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Shame on who?

Experiential and theoretical accounts of the constitution of women's shame within abusive intimate relationships

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Abstract

This feminist project explores the experiential accounts of twenty-five women who have lived through abuse within their intimate relationships. Their stories, gathered through a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews intended to elicit accounts of resilience were saturated with emotion-talk, especially shame-talk. To address questions of the relationship between these accounts and theoretical accounts of abuse, and shame the women's texts were engaged in an analytic dialogue with feminist knowledges of abuse against women, Erving Goffman's sociological understandings of shame, stigma and mortification of the self, Thomas Scheff's sociological theory of shame and social bonds, and feminist poststructuralist understandings around the constitution of human subjectivity. These conversations enabled development of a conceptual representation of the special and highly specific form of social bonding experienced by victims of abuse within intimate relationships. This bonding begins with processes of mortification of the self, the gradual erosion of a sense of self through the systematic imposition of various shaming and shameful actions. These processes take place within a specific social context created through the constitutive power of dominant discourses of gender, heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood which work to shape the lives of individual women. Because of the specific ways in which these discourses currently operate within Aotearoa New Zealand they result in the constitution of a narrow range of tightly prescribed subject positions available to victims of intimate partner abuse. This analysis leads to an argument that women's inability to 'do' motherhood or intimate partnership in line with dominant discourses of mothering and relationships (because these simply cannot be achieved within an abusive context), opens them to the debilitating effects of shame. Shame, both actual and threatened, promotes silence, isolation and dangerous private spaces as women seek to protect themselves from its painful experience. I argue that it is therefore crucial to promote the availability of discursive positioning for women living through abuse which offers non-shaming and realistic choices.

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Introduction: The shape of things to come

The opening chapter of this discussion details the beginnings of this project. It discusses the baseline philosophical understandings with which I began, outlines the intentions and desires underpinning my choice of research and then explores the feminist theoretical perspectives informing these. Feminist theories of domestic violence are surveyed and the notion of resilience is introduced. At this point in the project my research was focused in one direction; finding THE explanation of how it was that some women were able to remove themselves from the experience of abuse and maintain lives free from violence, whereas others appeared unable to do so, remaining with abusive partners for extended periods of time or eventually leaving, only to find themselves once more involved in violent relationships. For, so my reasoning went, if this puzzle could be solved through exploration of the experiences of ‘successful’ victims, then the resulting insights could be utilized to inform more effective support and helping strategies for those women still struggling to free themselves from abuse.

Chapter two begins with discussion and justification of the chosen method and methodology of the project. I outline the specific shape of the planned fieldwork strategy; describe the interviewing process and then move on to an account of the initial analysis. From here the chapter takes on a different character as I begin to detail troubling issues that arose during the data gathering and early analysis phases of the research. The first of these related my rather discomfoting realization that participants had somehow avoided addressing the things *I* wanted them to, the areas underlying my research agenda, and instead had chosen to talk about things of importance to them. My emotional response to this discovery is discussed, along with my reluctance to simply jettison the project which moved me along a different pathway as my attachment to specific versions of feminism came under scrutiny and I began to explore exactly where I myself was positioned within the research. Central to this was my recognition of an emotional component to my experience of interviewing which seemed to resonate in some way with the accounts of

the women I had spoken with – a sense of agonizing shamefulness which quickly became the focus of my inquiry. I came to see that much of this related to the ways in which feminist perspectives on domestic violence had worked to shape the ways in which my participants had understood their experiences of abuse and how I had approached the research, in effect creating ways of knowing abuse and being a victim of abuse. I discuss my return to my participants' accounts, using the filter of feminist standpoint theory to explore their stories with an eye to uncovering the gendered power relations I suspected to be at work within their relationships.

Chapter three takes my growing interest in the emotionality which participants' accounts suggested were attached to the experience of living with abuse and charts a course in pursuit of some way of explaining why and how this shamefulness arose. This led me first to the work of Erving Goffman, one of the few sociologists to explore the self-conscious emotions in depth. Adopting the conceptual vehicles he developed around shame and embarrassment, stigma, and mortification of the self, I again bring the women's accounts into conversation with the world of theory, interested in whether or not these conceptual tools provided any additional color or richness to sociological understandings of intimate partner violence. While concluding that they indeed did so, especially the processes painstakingly detailed in his description of mortification of the self, I remained troubled by two aspects of Goffman's framing. Firstly, his work, although based on a socially constructed understanding of the human self, failed to adequately consider the ways in which social power relations infuse that constructive process, a vital consideration in relation to a gendered phenomenon such as abuse within intimate relationship. Secondly, his accounts of painful, even agonizing emotional moments in the lives of people were presented in a disinterested and abstractly distant fashion, with no sense of 'felt' or subjectively experienced emotionality. In short, Goffman offered a fine-grained account of the display of day-to-day emotional and physical interactions of people, but without linking these adequately to the wider social context within which they occurred and with no real 'feeling'.

Chapter four details my attempts to address the missing aspects in Goffman's work by recourse to another sociologist of the emotions, Thomas Scheff. Turning initially to Scheff's work in search of an account of social power relations, I instead found myself most attracted to his explication of the 'social bond', the mechanism binding individuals into the larger social structure. Scheff suggests that this bond is primarily emotional in character with shame, which he considers as THE most social of emotions, providing the motivational linkage. To my mind Scheff provided a sociologically adequate account of the ways in which social structure 'fits together' or operates, but unfortunately failed to provide sufficient acknowledgement of the way these are so thoroughly infused with social power relations, especially in relation to issues such as gender. This results in an inevitably conservative and normative account of the social bond requiring significant re-examination from a feminist perspective.

Again in pursuit of a satisfactory account of social power relations, chapter five signals my move to a feminist poststructuralist position incorporating and synthesizing the work of Foucauldian informed feminist poststructuralists Judith Butler (2004), Susan Hekman and Chris Weedon. This discussion explores the central tenets of poststructuralism, especially the workings of power and constitution of the self, placing these in relationship to intimate partner abuse and emotionality. I arrive eventually at the work of Elspeth Probyn, a poststructuralist exploring ways of understanding shame. I found myself immeasurably impressed by her ability to convey a sense of embodied emotionality in her work. Her appropriation of the poetic work of Sylvain Tomkins brought together with accounts of intensely personal illustrative experiences I found incredibly refreshing and exciting after having encountered so many colorless and unemotional accounts of emotion. That said, in this chapter I take issue with Probyn in her presentation of shame as a predominantly 'productive' emotion. In respect of broad social issues such as racism (at one point she uses her framing to explore racial reconciliation in Australia) this is an analysis that works well but which presents some moral and political difficulties when placed alongside an issue such as abuse in intimate relationships.

In chapter six I bring the theories of the previous chapter more closely into direct conversation with participants' accounts and the ways in which the concept of abuse is constituted and understood. I explore the content of official/legal abuse discourse, tracing how this works, constructing powerful ways of knowing abuse and constituting specific ways of being a victim of abuse. Also discussed are the ways this official/legal discourse comes together with feminist discourse in the discursive practices of support agencies such as Women's Refuge, the Police and the New Zealand justice system, resulting in a sometimes contradictory mixture of constraint and enablement for women living through violence.

Chapter seven extends the previous analysis with discussion of the ways in which several other dominant discourses, those of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood, interact with the discourse(s) of abuse explored in the previous section. In this penultimate chapter I argue that the products of this meeting are subject positions or identities that are, for women living within abusive relationships, shameful/shaming and virtually impossible to occupy. As victims of abuse, their positioning within the dominant discursive framework of contemporary New Zealand mean that shaming/shameful failure is guaranteed. Although they are free to choose what the form this failure will take, the failure itself is inevitable.

The final section describes the gathering together of the various threads trailing from the theoretical perspectives picked apart throughout my analysis. It examines the elements discarded, explains the retention of others and discusses the implications of bringing these together with the women' accounts. It offers my conclusions which, although perhaps somewhat pessimistic in tone, do point the way forward towards what I believe could be a more effective and useful way of understanding and working towards the eradication of abuse of women within their intimate relationships.

Chapter 1

Initial theoretical and philosophical framing

This particular research area, the abuse of women within intimate partnerships, was chosen as a direct result of my personal and political interest in, for want of a better phrase, 'women's issues'. My specific research interest, why some women seemed more resilient and were able to move on from abuse more successfully than others, was a personally motivated one growing out of a two year period of involvement with Women's Refuge some years earlier. This time spent working with abuse survivors within a strongly feminist ethos, coupled with a course of academic study largely oriented towards women's issues and feminist theory, had culminated in the development of a particular philosophical and theoretical position – one heavily influenced by early feminist analyses of violence against women (Daly, 1973; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dworkin, 1993; Martin, 1976 & 1979; Brownmiller, 1975; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). In its initial stages then, this project was informed by a largely uncritical adoption of feminist preoccupations and theory around domestic violence and abuse. It was concerned primarily with traditional feminist questions to do with 'why they (abused women) stay', but with the intention of approaching this from a more positive direction by exploring how it was that so many women *did* manage to successfully disengage from abusive partnerships.

From a traditional feminist standpoint, abuse of women by their intimate male partners, while wide-spread, even endemic, and crossing all social and cultural boundaries, is a fairly straightforward issue (although complex in both experience and operation). Abuse is the inevitable and therefore unsurprising (if distressing) result of the patriarchal organisation of human society. In short, men use violence and abuse to maintain power and control over women – a strategy made possible by a relative lack of social sanctions against such behaviour (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Bart & Moran, 1993). Women are either victims, still living within violent relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker,

1979; Pagelow, 1984), or survivors, having left or stopped the violence and begun the process of healing (Kelly, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Hoff, 1990). It must be noted that while the issue itself is treated as relatively straightforward, this distinction is not always presented in such stark relief. Many feminist activists, including those referenced above, were careful to point out the often complex and fluid character of the experiences of those women living through violence and abuse.

In a pleasantly symbiotic way my reading of this work, and my desire to read, was, driven almost entirely by my introduction to and involvement with two products of the same social movement which inspired its creation – academic Women’s Studies and the Refuge Movement – both born out of early second wave feminism. And, to appropriate Elspeth Probyn’s words, “when you get very interested in something, it quickly seems that the whole world is revealed in its light” (2005, p. ix) – feminism, with its concepts of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, was, for me, that ‘something’. In very short order it became apparent to me that feminist analysis was indeed capable of answering my questions – and those of anyone else who cared to look! Broadly speaking, they still do. I was especially inspired by the way in which these women (and the occasional pro-feminist man) brought together the academic and activist in each of their lives - academic theory informing activism, activism informing theory, and all informed by passionate politics and a desire for positive social change. Many accounts of violence against women in the 1970s began with a description of the author or authors’ history, involvement with, or commitment to some form of activism – feminist collectives, local refuges or safe houses, anti-violence groups, help or crisis lines, and so on – indeed this was almost a defining characteristic of the literature at that time.

Looking back now, I recognize that the excitement engendered by these writers promoted much that was positive, both personally and academically. On a not quite so positive note, these same feelings also encouraged a partisan and far from critical approach to my reading. The political and activist underpinnings of their work operated to legitimize their arguments, working literally as ‘seals of approval’ and protection from protest or critique. This legitimacy was further strengthened by their demonstrated commitment to placing

women's experiences, voices and stories at the centre of their theoretical and academic accounts. I instinctively trusted their words. My own growing commitment to Women's Refuge and a fairly radical feminist politics meant that I was easily persuaded (and persuaded myself) to ignore dissonant notes, to paper over any small cracks, and excuse problems. After all, I knew that the words and arguments put forward weren't intended to perfectly mirror individual women's lives in all their everyday detail and difference; this was a collective project, on behalf of all women! A broad theoretical analysis was precisely the tool required to drive political and social change on behalf of womankind – changes assumed to be possible only with the solid backing of collective and united action.

Though preciously held at this time, I did come to question aspects of these theoretical positions when I later began placing my participants' words in conversation with them. I was led to ask myself what particular images/understandings/knowledges of 'woman', especially 'abused woman', and abuse, had I brought with me in forming this research? What had these meant in terms of how I had framed up my approach to abused women? What particular construction(s) of 'woman' were enabled (or disabled) to me by my adoption of approaches such as this?

A number of explanatory (and descriptive) categories offered by this literature spring readily to mind, none of which I believe can be ranked in terms of importance; all were/are powerful in their influence. Just as I hesitate to assign rankings, so too I am uneasy about presenting each in isolation, concerned that this strategy will itself constitute a de facto hierarchical ordering. I am also aware that simply not awarding equivalent attention to other discursive components runs the risk of minimizing, even screening from view their very existence. While these may be less than vital to this particular discussion, they may well be key aspects of some, even perhaps many, women's experience and/or understanding. Thus I ask my reader to carefully bear in mind that these are *my* points of emphasis. They are also *my* understandings and interpretations and while they may resonate with the view(s), understandings and interpretations of some, equally they may seem pale and lacking or even misguided to

others. They are nonetheless those which helped to create and most strongly flavored the images I brought to my work. Therefore, in no particular order, these categories were, patriarchy, as a primary orienting concept; women as victims, then survivors – a binary dichotomy of either/or; women as wives and mothers (and thus, heterosexual), women as emotion(al), controlled by their emotions and therefore irrational; the existence of a hierarchy of abuse, with physical violence constituting the most extreme (and therefore serious) abuse and; abuse as a systematic, cyclic and clearly patterned phenomenon.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy, as the form of societal organisation contextualizing domestic violence, provides the conceptual underpinning of early feminist analyses of violence. In its most basic form patriarchy is defined as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990, p. 20). It consists of various structural and ideological elements operating together to maintain a hierarchical form of societal organisation that ensures women’s subordination to men (Tong, 1998; Walby, 1990). I found the way in which Adrienne Rich explained this extremely persuasive, making explicit how this theoretical construct played out in women’s lives. Thus patriarchy is,

...the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power, or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers (Rich, 1977, p. 57).

It is this concept which enabled, even directed, many of the elements of constructions of abuse and abused women which were to follow. These would not have been possible, or even perhaps thinkable, outside the parameters of patriarchy. It remains a vital concept

from which to commence analysis of any form of gender inequality, especially men's abuse of women (Stark, 2007).

Such conceptual scaffolding leaves us with a picture of the abuse of women as almost to be expected, given the supreme power vested in individual abusive men by virtue of their maleness. This is a power legitimated by patriarchal institutions such as marriage and heterosexuality, and further supported by male control of the medical profession, organized religion and the state. Earlier theories of men's violence against their intimate partners as the result of interactions between individuals within deviant families, (for example, Straus et al, 1980, Gelles, 1974) were easily discounted/countered from a perspective based in patriarchy. While these theories often provided adequate *descriptors* of violent incidents, their lack of attention to context – the patriarchally ordered social/cultural/historical underpinnings of the violence – severely constrained their explanatory power (Schechter, 1982).

At least as far as most feminists were concerned such ideas were inadequate to the task of explaining the apparently endemic nature of this form of violence reported by women within our society. The words of Dobash & Dobash encapsulated for me the structural nature of the abuse of women.

the seeds of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and their subjection to male control and authority...institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family...supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system...that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, and sacred” (Dobash & Dobash,1979, pp. 33-4).

What such a structural analysis enabled was the linking of a wide range of previously unconnected abuses against women. No longer were phenomena such as rape and sexual violence seen as separate and easily distinguished from other forms of abuse such as battering. These were brought together as closely related manifestations of patriarchal power and control; all were forms of power and control exercised by men over and

against women. Similarly, various male dominated and controlled state institutions such as the police and judiciary were implicated in this systematic abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976; Schechter, 1982; Walker, 1979). As Lenore Walker contends, "...sexism is the real underbelly of human suffering" (1979, p. xi).

The nuclear family, heterosexism and marriage, as the "mechanism[s] by which the patriarchy is maintained" were singled out as key institutional players supporting, even encouraging, ongoing violence (Martin, 1976, p.37). "It [marriage] continues to be the foundation of male supremacy and of the subordination of women in society...it forms the foundation of wife beating" (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 45). Other commentators, feminist and otherwise, echoed this view, with Richard Gelles making the oft quoted comment that "in most cases a marriage license also functions as a hitting license" (1974, p. 153). Dobash and Dobash were equally explicit in linking marriage and the family with battering, contending that "for a woman to be brutally or systematically assaulted she must usually enter our most sacred institution, the family. It is within marriage that a woman is most likely to be slapped and shoved about, severely assaulted, killed or raped" (1979, p. 75). Indeed few feminist accounts from this time disagreed with this argument, naming heterosexual coupledness, but especially legal marriage, and the nuclear family as the predominant sites of men's violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Pagelow, 1981; Pizzey, 1974; Martin, 1976). As Susan Schechter warned, "soberly and chillingly, the existence of battered women compels all women to deal with the possibility that intimate relationships with men are not safe" (1982, p. 20).

Victims and/or survivors

The political and activist agenda of early literature discussing intimate partner violence was/is unmistakable. These authors aimed at bringing this private, individual violence into the public arena as a widespread, serious and destructive social problem and elicit sympathy and support for its victims - a task requiring identification of both the harm suffered and its victims. This was, in itself a relatively simple point, with little effort required to demonstrate the nature and extent of violence against wives and identify

women as overwhelmingly the victims of their husbands' violence. What was more problematic however was their need to account for the fact that these victims often chose to remain with their abusers, suggesting either complicity in, responsibility for, or at least tacit acceptance of, the violence. An assumption of rationality and free choice as underlying human action meant that such behavior required explanation. The apparent irrationality of women choosing to stay in a dangerous battering situation demanded justification.

In the first instance this was accomplished through the construction of battered women as 'pure' victims (Dunn, 2005; Lamb, 1996). Women were thus described as the utterly powerless, virtual prisoners of brutal men, their acquiescence to abuse guaranteed by the total absence of any social support or help with their plight and few sanctions for their husbands' behavior.

Fear immobilizes them, ruling their actions, their decisions, their very lives....So shocked and frightened by their husbands' violence were these women that they were unable to respond to the situation. They cowered in terror....If the wife does manage to escape, her husband often stalks her like a hunted animal....she lives in constant dread that he will find her. With every car idling in the street, each footstep in the hall, every noise outside her door, she freezes in sheer terror (Martin, 1976, p. 77-8).

The battered woman finds herself living in fear, feeling powerless and without hope. Her self-confidence evaporates. Paranoia develops. She starts to think less and less of herself, because she is neither fighting back nor getting out....She no longer thinks of leaving. She accepts the abuse as part of her life....She no longer calls the unemployment office; she no longer visits the therapist; she no longer cries to her mother. Her victimization is complete. She has given up (Fleming, 1979, p. 95).

They [battered women] survive each day, performing necessary tasks, with a dull depression and lack of enthusiasm....Battered women who perceive their husbands' actions as life-threatening experience a penetrating fear that consumes all their thoughts and energies. The awareness of murderous intent by a presumed ally who is a central figure in all aspects of her life destroys all bases for safety. There is a feeling that death is imminent, and that there is nowhere to hide (Ferraro, 1983, p. 334).

These types of descriptions constituted an explicit vocabulary of victimization, and promoted a more sympathetic image of battered women as victims. Given the intense fear and terror experienced by these women, in the context of absolute control and entrapment by their abusers, they became seen as helpless and quite understandably incapable of responding to their abuse in any constructive or healthy fashion. The image offered was one of dispirited, beaten down, passive, and entirely innocent women who were not responsible for their situation and were also unmistakably deserving of public sympathy and support.

This was/is a language legitimated and supported by the framework of learned helplessness first applied to battered women by feminist psychologist Lenore Walker (1979). In developing her theory of 'Battered Woman Syndrome', Walker's basic thesis was that abused women experience an ongoing cycle of violence that creates a learned helplessness, thus diminishing their capability to escape from the abusive relationship. Walker drew the concept of learned helplessness from the experimental work of Martin Seligman (1975). Seligman's theory is based on experiments carried out on dogs, during which the animals were administered repeated electric shocks from which they were initially unable to escape. After a period of time the animals became totally passive and submissive, giving up all attempts to escape even when shown an escape route. These experiments also demonstrated that the younger the animals were when they received this treatment, the longer it took them to recover. Walker saw similarities between the treatment received by these experimental dogs and the abuse meted out to battered women by their partners, suggesting that both resulted in a state of learned helplessness.

She then argued that this led to deficits in the ways in which battered women thought, felt and behaved (Walker 1979). According to Walker,

repeated beatings, like electric shocks (in animal experiments), diminish the woman's motivation to respond. She becomes passive...Her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not believe that her response will result in a favourable outcome, whether or not it might...the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter any outcome, not just the specific situation that has occurred. She says, "no matter what I do, I have no influence" (1979, p.49-50).

In applying her theory of learned helplessness to battered women, Walker discusses the implications for 'treatment' efforts in noting that for battering – and the syndrome of learned helplessness - to end, victims must be strongly encouraged and assisted to modify their beliefs and behaviour, as was the case with Seligman's experimental animals. These animals were only able to overcome their passivity by being repeatedly dragged away from their cages and taught how to avoid being shocked. Walker drew a close parallel between this and the situation of battered women, noting that just as this experimental work had helped explain why women stayed with violent partners, it could also point the way towards potential remedial strategies. The suggestion here was that women would first need to be persuaded to leave their abuser, this persuasion to come from some outside agency in a way equated by Walker to the dragging received by Seligman's dogs from the researchers (Walker 1979 p.53)¹.

In conjunction with development of BWS, Walker's early work also includes description of a range of characteristics she believed were typical of all battered women; poor self-esteem, belief in commonsense understandings or myths about abusive relationships,

¹ It is important to note that in later years Walker herself added significantly to this early framing, bringing into focus the complexity of battered women's lives with a more sophisticated account of both their experiences and potential strategies or solutions (1989).

acceptance of traditional gender roles around marriage, home and motherhood, and self-blame or acceptance of responsibility for her husband's abusive actions (Walker, 1979).

Work based around this same or similar conceptualizations of battered women as emotionally broken, helpless, passive victims came under critique on the grounds that it presented a construction of battered women as virtually devoid of agency and thus totally at the mercy of their abusers (Kelly, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). As early as the late 1970s, Kathleen Barry drew attention to the stigmatizing aspects of this victim identity², noting that it

creates a framework for others to know her [the abused woman] not as a person but as a victim, someone to whom violence has been done...an objectification which establishes new standards for defining experience; those standards dismiss any question of will, and deny that the woman even while enduring sexual violence is a living, changing, growing, interactive person (1979, p. 38).

This critical attention, even voiced by activists within the battered women's movement, led to efforts to rehabilitate constructions of battered women, aiming this time at emphasizing the strength and amazing coping skills of women experiencing abuse (Schechter, 1982). Accounts of violence against women became focussed on creating an image of battered women that restored both their agency and rationality and emphasized their active resistance to men's violence. Descriptions of those experiencing abuse began to adopt a language of survival and purposeful strategizing, reconceptualizing behaviour previously seen as deviant and irrational as part of an active, even heroic, process as abused women strove to protect themselves and their children (Dunn, 2005). The bravery and courage of these women was further emphasized by work detailing the unsupportive, even hostile, social context of their everyday lives. For example,

Sex role socialization, economic dependency, and unsupportive institutions combine to make the task of leaving an abusive relationship particularly difficult.

² That these images persist and in fact create barriers to effective service development is a point raised in the work of UK researchers such as Rosemary Aris, Gill Hague and Audrey Mullender. See Mullender & Hague 2001 & 2005, Hague 2005 and Aris *et al* 2003 for development of this point.

But despite mythology to the contrary, battered women are actively engaged in changing their lives....Battered women are not passive; rather they engage in step-like, logical behavior as they attempt to stop the violence or leave (Schechter, 1982, p. 232-3).

...women make choices and act. Just as we are not passive at the time of assaults nor are we passive victims in relation to the consequences of abuse....Women's coping responses are active, constructive adaptations to experiences of abuse....Women resist by refusing to be controlled...Resistance, therefore, involves active opposition to abusive men's behavior. The focus on coping, resistance and survival...draws attention to the strength women display despite their experiences of victimization (Kelly, 1988, p. 159-63).

They [battered women] have a "drive to survive" that must be acknowledged, reinforced, and honoured (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988, p. 38)...battered women are active helpseekers....not the passive victims that notions of learned helplessness would imply. They are in fact "survivors", in that they assertively and persistently attempt to do something about their abuse (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988, p. 91-3).

This creation of a survivor vocabulary aimed to address the concerns raised by critics of the language of victimization most often applied to abused women, though how successfully is still a moot point (Aris, Hague & Mullender, 2003). In addition, it has been argued that the creation of the dichotomous categories of victim and survivor poses often serious problems for women who experience abuse, placing them in a difficult either/or situation. On the one hand if they adopt the identity of victim – in order to gain help, support and sympathy, they face the potential stigma attached to notions of helplessness, irrationality and lack of agency (Leisenring 2006). On the other, taking on a survivor identity can entail denial of victimization. As others have suggested (for example, Caroline Picart 2003), such binaries can be intensely destructive in their failure to acknowledge the complexities faced by abused women as they attempt to negotiate constantly shifting experiences of agency and powerlessness on a daily basis.

Heterosexism – Wives & mothers

Within the vast majority of the intimate partner violence literature, both early and contemporary, the category of battered or abused women is presented as implicitly heterosexual (VanNatta, 2005). This categorical solidity was/is an almost inevitable result of early challenges by feminists of the ancient idea of women as possessions of men - the property of their husbands. Many of the earlier works, for instance, Dobash & Dobash (1979), Martin (1976) and Walker (1979) trace the historical development of contemporary matrimony to demonstrate the ownership implied by marriage contracts and ceremonies. As noted earlier, Richard Gelles (1974) describes the marriage license as a hitting license – a view echoed by Walker (1979). Thus we see discussions of abuse couched almost exclusively in the language of legal marriage – of violence perpetrated by husbands upon their wives or spouses, occurring within conjugal or marital circumstances, and to be terminated only by divorce or death. Most of those researching and writing in the area were careful to note the limitations of this conceptualization and attempted to broaden their parameters to include women not legally married to their abusers. Nonetheless, the very titles of key publications – for example, *Battered wives* by Martin (1976), *Violence against wives* by Dobash & Dobash (1979), *Conjugal crime* by Davidson (1978) and even *Feminist perspectives on wife abuse* by Yllo et al (1988), all readily demonstrate the position of legal marriage as a key institutional player within their frameworks. Works with more ambiguous titles such as *The battered woman* by Walker (1979) and *Woman-battering* by Pagelow (1981) still advanced arguments framed almost entirely in the language of matrimony.

The heterosexist underpinnings of the literature remained largely unquestioned for decades and constitute a major lacuna in much contemporary work (VanNatta, 2005). Some awareness of abuse within same-sex relationships did exist as early as the 1980s although this was seen as a “rarer type of conjugal abuse” (Okun, 1986, p. xvi), or even unexpected in relation to lesbian relationships. Susan Schechter notes in a surprised tone for instance that, “in recent years some activists in the [battered women’s] movement

have discovered that women in lesbian relationships are sometimes battered” (1982, p. 234).

Attention to the influence of traditional gender roles upon abuse was not (and is not) restricted to the role of wife/spouse however. Despite sitting extremely uneasily alongside feminist analyses of the socially constructed nature of motherhood, an unmistakably traditional version of women/mothers as ultimate protectors/carers of children threads its way through many accounts of domestic violence (Mullender & Morley, 1994). A great deal of discussion is devoted throughout both early and contemporary works detailing the effects of women’s socialization and experience as mothers, and of children as influential to their mothers’ decision-making processes. Most book-length accounts discuss women’s parental status as a key variable or thematic³, while few edited collections fail to include at least one section dealing either with abused women as mothers, or the impact of abuse upon children⁴. Being a mother is described as interfering with the leaving process (either because women lack resources to care for their children or adhere to traditional beliefs about fatherhood and the nuclear family), or as propelling the same process (because of fear of the consequences of abuse for children, or because the children are, or are at risk of, being abused themselves). Thus, although a clear analysis of the socially constructed nature of motherhood and an equally solid rejection of the biologically-based conflation of giving birth and mothering runs throughout these discussions, these are accompanied (and considerably weakened) by an equally clear assumption that motherhood remains an expected and accepted part of the life trajectory of most (all) women (O’Reilly, 2004). Unfortunately, also weakened are warnings around the potential for such assumptions to slide easily into exacerbated victim blaming.

³ For example, Pizzey (1974), Fleming (1979), Martin (1976), Davidson (1978), Walker (1979)

⁴ For example, Yllo & Bograd (1988) and Roy (1977)

Women as emotion(al)

Traditional gender roles and patriarchal socialization processes were not the only targets of feminist writers at that time. Also launched was a closely related parallel attack on traditional conceptualizations of women as intimately linked to the private world of nature, emotion and irrationality, as opposed to the positioning of men as occupying the public sphere of culture, rationality and reason (Tong, 1989). As Susan Hekman (1990) has also explained, this is an important task for feminism given the way in which Enlightenment discourses of rationality present emotional and rational women as the counterpoint to rational and unemotional men.

Yet within the domestic violence literature women's connection to emotion and irrationality was less vehemently rejected – and for what seemed good reason. As Dunn (2005) notes, early feminist activists and researchers were facing a difficult problem. Somehow they needed to find a way to establish wife battering as a serious social problem, extinguish all chance of victim blaming, and yet still account for the apparently irrational behaviour of women remaining emotionally tied to their abusers and unable to separate from them, despite often extreme violence. These problems led to the development within the 1970s and 80s literature of dominant constructions of abused women as almost totally at the mercy of their feelings.

Controlled by their emotionality, these women were unable and/or unwilling to leave violent men because of emotional constraints created by their experiences of abuse, ranging from shame through to love and fear or a desire to protect others. Either they were ashamed;

Her sense of responsibility will lead her to feel ashamed if her marriage 'fails', and she will try above all else to save face...Against great odds, a woman in this situation will excuse her husband's violence, calling it a momentary outburst. Or, if she cannot escape the fact that he has been repeatedly violent, she will try hard to believe he will change (Martin, 1976, p. 82).

Or still loved their abuser;

Abused wives not infrequently report that they love their husbands and hope for a change in the abusive behavior....Those spouses who do love their husbands in spite of abuse face the prospect of a formidable loss should they decide to leave (Waites, 1978 cited in Fleming, 1979, p. 91).

Or feared them;

The women were a study in paralyzing terror which is reminiscent of the rape trauma syndrome except that the stress is unending and the threat of the next assault ever-present...Agitation and anxiety bordering on panic were almost always present...There was chronic apprehension of imminent doom, of something terrible always about to happen...Sleep, when it came, brought no relief. Nightmares were universal (Hilberman & Munson, 1978, cited in Fleming, 1979, p. 88).

It is the fear of knowing that someone is searching for you and will beat you when he finds you....this fear blots out all reason. The man seems to be omnipotent....Anyone who has been badly knocked about loses all sense of reality and ability to cope. Battered women are almost permanently in a shocked state. The constant fear of another beating leaves them very tense and nervous (Pizzey, 1974, pp. 39-41).

Or feared the thought of being alone;

“Of course, the thought of leaving can be frightening. You may not be able to see any way out of your situation. If you have not worked outside the home or don’t have any job skills, you may worry about how to support yourself and your

children. You may not know where to go, much less how to go about being on your own” (Fleming, 1979, p. 22).

The fear of being alone causes women to put up with indignities no human being would believe they could endure” (Walker, 1989, p. 182-3)... “Many women do become frightened at the prospect of being totally responsible for their lives and return to their violent relationships (Walker, 1989, p. 189.

Or felt in some way responsible for the protection of others;

Fear of reprisal also prevents the battered wife from running to her neighbours for help during an attack. The woman may be less concerned with protecting her secret at the moment than she is with protecting her neighbors.... Thus, out of fear of endangering others, her children as well, the woman may choose to sacrifice herself (Martin, 1976, p. 77-8).

The emotional flavor of work during this time is closely linked to the agenda noted earlier – the construction of battered women as innocent victims. Thus it emphasized their helpless emotionality. Yes, it was true that these women were behaving in an apparently irrational way, but how could they possibly be blamed for this given the state of abject terror characterizing their daily lives? Later work, recognising the danger presented by essentialist versions of victimization, began to adopt a slightly different perspective – still using a similar language of emotionality, but couching this more in terms of strength, survival, and active, rational strategizing (Dunn, 2004).

Ironically, as attempts to destabilize traditional linkages between women/emotion/irrationality and men/reason/rationality continued and intensified within the wider feminist literature, feminist analyses of violence against women served often to reinstitute these. As common-sense explanations of men’s violence as the uncontrollable emotionally driven behavior of pathologically disturbed individual men came under challenge, reinterpreted instead as carefully rational expressions of patriarchal power and

control, so too were the responses of abused women presented in many cases as the unsurprising (indeed, inevitable) consequence of emotionally over-whelming events.

Hierarchy of abuse

A hierarchy of violence, one which positions physical attacks involving punching, kicking, slapping, or the use of weapons as the most serious, followed by sexual assaults, then other ‘lesser’ forms of abuse, including emotional, psychological, spiritual, and economic violence, is clearly evident within most discussions of domestic violence, both historically and contemporarily (Stark, 2007). Few authors fail to recognize non-physical violence, either then or now. Indeed many make the point that these are integral elements of abusive relationships. Lewis Okun, for instance, notes that

batterers always employ verbal and psychological abuse as well. . . . There is as yet no record of a battering relationship free from this linkage of verbal and psychological, in addition to physical, abuse (1986, p. 71).

He then goes on to concentrate almost exclusively upon physical violence. His point is echoed by Pizzey (1974), Martin (1976), Dobash & Dobash (1979), along with a host of others – the vast majority of whom follow the same strategy as Okun. Some even note claims from research participants that some effects of non-physical abuse may be longer lasting and more insidiously damaging than physical battering (Walker, 1979). In more recent times, this point has been made more strongly, with assertions that

a majority of battered women report that psychological abuse they suffer has a *more* severe impact on them than the physical violence (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, p. 5).

In the majority of discussions however, this insight is largely stripped of importance as it is sidelined by an immediate (re)turn to exploration of physical violence/assault. As can be seen in the foregoing quote, not only is the victim labeled as ‘battered’ – a term

primarily evocative of physical violence, but there is also an assumption that the two forms of violence inevitably co-exist. While I accept that psychological abuse does indeed always accompany physical violence, as Okun (1986) notes above, I am less convinced that the reverse holds true. One can be virtually assured that a physically beaten woman will have been verbally, psychologically and/or emotionally abused. On the other hand, it seems less certain that a psychologically and emotionally abused woman, equally as controlled, but by verbally inflicted humiliation and shame, will have experienced physical assault – although she may well live in terror of such violence.

This issue - the identification and definition of domestic violence, what actually constituted abuse within intimate relationships (and the consequent construction of the identity of ‘abuse victim’), occupied significant space in the early feminist literature as researchers grappled with how this ‘new’ social problem should be conceptualized. Judging by the approach adopted by most authors/researchers, answers to these questions entailed either construction or acceptance of a clear hierarchical ordering of violence(s). Lenore Walker was one such, discussing at length the conceptual dilemmas she faced in her early research. This is a process worth quoting at length because of the way Walker’s text illustrates so vividly how the importance and impact of non-physical abuse can be acknowledged but yet still be presented as a form of abuse subordinate to, and implicitly less serious than, physical violence.

While it was perfectly evident that women suffering physical mutilation were battered, some women reported incidents which did not produce physical damage. It became difficult to distinguish between those women living in unfulfilling and unhappy marriages and those in battering relationships. The differentiation was not well defined until about midway through this project. The commonality was the life-threatening incidents that continuously occurred in battered women’s lives. Early on, I decided that a woman’s story was to be accepted if she felt she was being psychologically and/or physically battered by her man...Most of the women in this project describe incidents involving psychological humiliation and verbal harassment as their worst battering experiences, whether or not they had

been physically abused. Furthermore, the threat of physical violence was always present: each believed the batterer was capable of killing her...(1979, pp. xiv-xv).

The hierarchy of violence remains a prevalent and taken-for-granted component of abuse discourse and exerts a powerful influence upon knowledge of what constitutes legitimate abuse (and legitimate abuse victims) (Stark, 2007). Attached to this are two related subsidiary notions worth explicit unpacking – firstly, that other forms of abuse are less harmful or damaging, and secondly, for domestic abuse to be seen as ‘serious’ it must be not only physically injurious but sustained and ongoing. These understandings are the (albeit unintended) legacy of the way in which the issue was (and continues to be) framed within the abuse literature. Many academic and activist accounts of domestic violence utilize illustrative ‘horror stories’ – often including narratives of sadistic torture and life-threatening experiences (for example, Walker, 1979 & 1989 and Kelly’s story in Hann, 2001). The very titles of many publications indicate a close attachment to physical violence and life threatening danger, for example, *Violence against women: The bloody footprint* (Bart & Moran, 1993) and *Next time she’ll be dead* (Jones, 2000).

This hierarchy of violence, despite its explicit repudiation in both Refuge philosophy and training, was/is difficult to avoid, both on a personal level and on a more pragmatic level as a Refuge worker. The immediately visible consequences of physical assault have an inescapably powerful and dramatic effect upon witnesses – especially those working with and supporting bruised and bleeding victims. The urgency of need so graphically demonstrated by physical injury, as opposed to the less directly observable (and confirmable) trauma of psychological/emotional/sexual violence generally resulted in an unquestioned acceptance of victim claims and ensured immediate assistance. It also ensured the instant cooperation of other support services, such as doctors, lawyers and police, and the wider public⁵. Unfortunately what is also ensured is perpetuation of the commonsense understanding (and therefore powerful component of abuse discourse) that intimate partner abuse *equals* bruises, despite the fact that it is now thought that levels of

⁵ The public acceptance of and support for victims of physical violence is clearly illustrated by the effectiveness of visually explicit media images of bruised and battered victims during Women’s Refuge annual fundraising campaigns.

verbal abuse directed at women constitute a strong predictor of physical battering (Bennett, Goodman & Dutton, 2000).

I am not suggesting that lethal assault be seen as less important, or even that all forms of domestic abuse be treated in the same manner. This would be a disingenuous, even simplistic argument. Lethal assault demands at least the same level of timely and committed response from all agencies charged with its policing that current policy demands. Indeed, even most commonsense understandings of the seriousness of violent assault are unproblematic. However, it is important that the lethal potential of *all* forms of abuse be acknowledged with the linkages between psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse and victim suicide having been clearly established in recent times. Similarly, while a push or slap may not cause injury, let alone death, the potential for these ‘minor’ assaults to result in a fatality must not be neglected, in our policies, practices and even our language.

Cycle(s) of violence

Another important and equally durable component of abuse discourse is the idea of violence as patterned, systematic and cyclic (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). In large part this can be traced to the work of Lenore Walker around development of her concept of ‘Battered Woman Syndrome’ (1979). As explained earlier, Walker’s basic thesis is that the ongoing cycle of violence experienced by abused women creates a sense of learned helplessness which severely inhibits their ability to deal effectively with the abuse. Learned helplessness is considered to produce deficits in the ways in which battered women think, feel and behave, thus resulting in increasingly passive behaviour and helplessness⁶ in the face of ongoing abuse. In effect, the abused woman comes to feel a

⁶ This is a point noted by Mullender & Hague (2005) and also by Hague (2005) in their discussions around difficulties in achieving participation by survivors in domestic violence service provision and improvement forums. In this work the authors highlight the ways in which service provider understandings of survivors as inevitably and always passive, damaged and in need of shielding operate as barriers to survivor participation in the name of protection – often regardless of the desires and/or circumstances of specific women. As these authors point out, for some women participation in such forums could well play a valuable part in their recovery from experiences of violence.

virtually total loss of personal agency and control over her life. She is by this stage totally terrorised by her abuser.

Terror of her abuser is a seed that is planted in the psyche of the battered woman by repeated subjection to psychologically sadistic manipulation and physical bullying; it grows and grows until she is incapable of believing in the effectiveness of taking positive action on her own behalf, until she has become a true victim of learned helplessness....Battered women experience a bloodcurdling kind [of terror] that leaves a hole in the pit of the stomach, that makes a person shake from the inside out (Walker, 1989, p. 64).

Walker's argument is built around a three stage model. The first stage, or tension building phase, is characterised by 'minor' incidents of abuse, with the woman tending to minimise the abuse and either take on blame herself or attach it to outside factors, rather than the batterer. She will generally see the abuse as justified or legitimate, resulting in behaviour/actions aimed towards doing everything she can to calm and pacify her partner, based on the belief that she can prevent his anger from increasing. These abusive incidents become increasingly frequent and serious through this stage as the batterer tries to further solidify his control – thus the tension-building description. The second stage, the explosion, is described as the point at which the tension built up during the previous phase is released in an uncontrollable and particularly violent assault – an episode normally triggered by an external event or situation. The third and final stage of the model is the contrite loving phase, during which the batterer recognises he has gone too far and attempts to convince his partner that he is sorry and will never hit her again. For a number of possible reasons – love of the partner, commitment to the relationship, family responsibilities and so on – the woman manages to convince herself of the sincerity of his apologies and promises, and stays in the relationship. For Walker, once a woman has been through more than one of these cycles and still remains in the relationship, she can be defined as a battered woman.

Walker's early research has been critiqued (and as noted earlier, Walker's later accounts were significantly more sophisticated) on methodological grounds, suggesting that the research lacks adequate statistical analysis, suffers from self-report bias and does not fully support the conclusions drawn by Walker (Bradfield, 2002; Burke, 2002 & Schopp, Sturgis & Sullivan, 1994). Some critics have levelled claims that the research is biased in relation to race and class issues (Allard, 1991; Ammons, 1995), while others draw attention to the way it tends to further perpetuate stereotypical understandings of abused women as passive and helpless victims (Schuller & Rzepa, 2002). Others have suggested that widespread acceptance of BWS can operate to create new stereotypes of abused women. Use of BWS, particularly as a legal defence, also entails a tacit acknowledgement that the defendant is mentally deficient, disturbed or incapacitated, not that her response was entirely reasonable within an abusive context (Osthoff & Maguigan, 2005, Downs & Fisher, 2005). As powerful as many of these critiques clearly are, their implications for my project remained largely unexamined at this point.

Patterning similar to that identified by Walker is discussed by Dobash & Dobash (1979), although their version is more of a steady/progressive acceleration of violence as the relationship continues. Both however assume a steadily accelerating trajectory of violence, an idea echoed in much of the 1970-80s domestic violence literature (Roy, 1977; Okun, 1986). The strength of this patterned understanding of abuse can be seen in the still influential notion that the best (only?) remedial strategy for abusive relationships is separation (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007; Wuest & Merritt-Gray 2008; Yoshioka & Choy, 2005). Walker (1984), for instance, argues strongly that acceleration of violence is unavoidable, the dynamics of violent relationships ensuring that death – of one party or the other, will eventually result. Victims of domestic violence are depicted as “riding [a] spiraling cycle to one irrevocable, inevitable end: battered women who kill in self defence (1989, p. 4). Violent relationships are described as virtually beyond any hope of redemption and are “better off dissolved; the cycle of violence, once begun, is nearly impossible to stop” (Walker, 1989, p. 7), or as “like quicksand: once they go beyond a certain point, it is impossible to turn them back or even sometimes to get out alive” (Walker, 1989, p. 125).

Descriptions of this type have an equally inevitable result however, in that women who leave and then choose to return to their abusers slot extremely easily into another category – that of recidivist. While unsurprising, this also has the unpleasant consequence of sliding smoothly into victim blaming – as reflected in the ongoing preoccupation with individualistically focussed questions around ‘why she stays’ or ‘why she doesn’t just leave’. Thus not only is the abused woman responsible for her ongoing abuse, but social responsibility for abuse is deflected or hidden from view. After all, so the argument goes, if the support structures are in place, then what more can be done if she still chooses violence over safety.

This problem preoccupied many of us working with abused women, prompting a continual process of self-questioning. For myself, while I was convinced of the ‘rightness’ of the Women’s Refuge philosophy and service model, I still found myself frequently saddened and disappointed as women retreated from the protection of our safe house to return to their abusers. While my training had left me well versed in the dynamics of abusive relationships and fully prepared for the (anticipated) leave/return cycle, I still found it all but impossible to not feel a sense of personal failure when this happened.

Intergenerational cycle of violence – another version of ‘the cycle’

Closely linked to the section above concerning the influence of children and the social construction of motherhood is the notion of an intergenerational cycle of violence. This was something I adopted largely unchallenged in my early conceptualisation of this project, pushing aside a nagging awareness of the value judgements involved – these I excused on the grounds that they were necessary if we (Refuge workers) were to ‘keep children safe’. A quite different ‘cycle of violence’, this particular incarnation is more damaging to victims of abuse than that proposed by Lenore Walker. While the latter creates a narrow and prescriptive way of ‘being a victim’, something dangerous enough

in itself, the intergenerational transmission of abuse theory compounds this damage by attaching responsibility for ‘breaking the cycle’ with mothers/victims (mothers).

This perspective, based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1973 & 1977), suggests that abuse, normally expressed through power and control tactics, is learnt through socialisation processes and thus passed down through families. Proponents of the theory suggest that children exposed to abuse are significantly more likely to repeat this abuse in their own adult partnerships (O’Leary, 1988; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Some research has in fact found family violence to be one of the most consistent and accurate predictors of intimate partner violence among adults (Stith et al., 2000, Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). This claim has however received only equivocal support from many other researchers. In an extensive review of research since 1986, Delsol and Margolin for example offer only qualified support, noting that

Although there is some truth to the notion that violence begets violence with respect to marital aggression, mere exposure to violence in the family of origin does not necessarily mean that a man will become martially violent. There is a link between growing up in a violent home and engaging in husband-to-wife abuse, but overall, this link is quite modest... (2004, p.118).

Claims of an intergenerational cycle of violence are frequently invoked to demonstrate why abuse is such an urgent social problem (Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; Delsol & Margolin, 2004), and also to support particular forms of intervention. These were arguments I found hugely persuasive, particularly given that such claims characterized the early domestic violence literature – feminist and otherwise, and continue to constitute a dominant theme in contemporary research (Delsol & Margolin, 2004). Linkages are routinely posited between childhood exposure to violence and increased risk of adult victimization (for girls), or violent adult offending (for boys) (Heyman, 2002; Pollak, 2004; Purvin, 2003).

Regardless of significant critique and only limited/qualified empirical support, the intergenerational transmission of violence theory flavored much early feminist activism – including the work of Women’s Refuge, and continues to enjoy solid support from policy makers, service providers and the general public (Mullender & Morley, 1994). Certainly it seemed a sensible and entirely rational argument to me as I began this project.

Personally I could see little possibility that children could be exposed to the horrifying levels of abuse I heard described by some Refuge clients and *not* suffer serious negative repercussions in their adult relationships. Operating from this standpoint I *began* (albeit sympathetically) from a place of understanding abused mothers as placing their children in jeopardy – and with the idea that they too should be aware of the potential consequences. The connections were so commonsense that I failed to see how they could *not* understand them in the same way I did.

Enter resilience

My interest in the notion of ‘resilient survivors’ – a concept that will be unpacked in detail below, was driven by a pragmatic concern about the high stress and ‘burnout’ levels among both paid and unpaid staff that I witnessed, and experienced, during my time with the local Refuge collective. One source of stress - drawing from informal conversations with other workers at both local and national gatherings - was a sense of disillusionment and helpless impotence at the high ‘failure’ or ‘recidivism’ rates characterizing our work with abuse victims. Investigation of recidivism or, as it is more commonly termed in the domestic violence literature, the ‘leave/return’ cycle, has been the primary focus of much partner abuse research, as evidenced by the ongoing preoccupation with efforts to track down the answer to ‘why she stays’ questions (e.g. Kirkwood, 1993). However, it is less often mentioned in relation to the way it may impact upon workers and is rarely discussed as a contributor to staff burnout (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007).

The impact on workers is instead most commonly attributed to the emotional demands generated by working with severely traumatized woman – in particular having to hear

repeated accounts of “trauma survivors’ terrifying, horrifying, and shocking images; strong, chaotic affect; and intrusive traumatic memories” (Jenkins & Baird, 2002, p. 423). Labeled variously as secondary traumatic stress, burnout, vicarious traumatization, and compassion fatigue, these responses are conceptualized in the social services literature as being associated with human service workers who routinely deal closely with other people’s problems. Maslach (1982), for instance, describes burnout as a form of defensive response to ongoing occupationally required contact with stressful interpersonal situations that result in severe psychological and/or emotional strain. The consequences of these reactions may include problems or difficulties around physical, emotional, behavioral, work-related and/or interpersonal aspects of one’s life. While most commonly related to therapists working with sexual assault or incest victims, vicarious traumatization is also now recognised as a potential consequence for those working with victims of domestic violence (Jenkins & Baird, 2002).

The importance of dealing with these issues was and is both recognised and acknowledged by Women’s Refuge – with standard operating procedures including the need for staff supervision. For paid workers this involves professional supervision on a regular and ongoing basis; for unpaid workers, most collectives utilize peer supervision sessions, accompanied by the availability of individual professional supervision if required or requested. However, despite supervision, peer support and awareness of the ‘facts’ - that escaping violence and creating an abuse-free life is an immensely difficult process, fraught with contradiction and confusion and frequently characterized by a vicious leave/return cycle - many of us still felt a sense of failure when a woman with whom we had been working ‘chose’ to return to her abuser.

Learning the ‘right way’ of knowing and helping

All Refuge workers, both paid and unpaid, undergo relatively similar training, consisting of between 50 and 70 hours⁷ of workshop style sessions covering topics such as power

⁷ While an official training manual is produced by NCIWR, outlining optimal training, training varies widely between collectives dependent largely upon staffing and resourcing issues.

and control, heterosexism and homophobia, collectivity and consensus decision-making and listening skills, among others. Trainees take part in closely scripted role-playing sessions during which they are taught how to ‘correctly’ interact with clients, both on the telephone and in person. All sessions are couched in implicitly feminist language, following a consciousness raising model. Besides imparting a basic understanding of the dynamics of abuse and a range of support skills, the training aims to create a shared philosophy and politics based, broadly speaking, within a feminist theoretical framework. Central to the training is communication of a specific and closely prescribed analysis of violence against women. Some diversity of political positioning is tolerated – for instance, not all workers would label themselves as feminist and this would not impact upon their employment or membership of the organisation. However this latitude does not extend to workers’ understandings of the dynamics and consequences of abuse.

The model or framework communicated throughout training is embedded within and informed by several equally important central premises. First is a politically and philosophically inspired belief that abuse of women and children, under any circumstances and for whatever ‘reason’, is inherently and fundamentally unacceptable. Second is an understanding that, in one form or another, abuse pervades women’s lives, either as individual women actually experiencing abuse or in the sense that all women live with the knowledge (conscious or unconscious) of their vulnerability to abuse. And finally is a fundamental concern with questions of gender and power. In concert with commitment to collectivism, lesbian visibility and parallel development, these concepts together constitute the analytic, political and philosophical centre of the organisation. Parallel development is a vital aspect of the Refuge structure, a demonstrated commitment to bicultural organizational structure acknowledging the partnership between Maori and Pakeha in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The theoretical basis of Refuge analysis lies in a particular understanding of abuse as a form of patriarchally inspired, encouraged and supported coercive control of women by men.

The coercive control model

Most influential within feminist analyses of abuse, whether sociological or psychological, and central to the work of Women's Refuge, is the coercive control model of abuse. Whether deployed in a structurally or individually based fashion, in terms of its basic elements, this model constitutes perhaps *the* central unifying strand of most feminist analyses of abuse and violence.

A feminist analysis of violence connects it to the pervasive sexism in our norms, values and institutions...It identifies violence as a tactic of entitlement and power that is deeply gendered, rather than as a symptom of a disorder or as a conflict tactic that is individual and gender neutral (Yllo, 2005, pp.21-24).

Growing out of the experiences of abused women and of those women working with them, rather than from abstract academic theory, the coercive control model was an attempt to articulate an intelligible analysis of the pervasive abuse and violence they encountered (Yllo, 2005). Dating from the early 1970s, this analysis of gendered power and control has become a cornerstone of feminist academic commentary and continues to inform antiviolence activism throughout the western world (Stark 2007).

In essence, the coercive control analysis presents abuse of women as an inevitable symptom of patriarchal social organisation. Men are understood to use violence as a control tactic to maintain male dominance, a process aided by gender based inequalities which permeate society. These inequalities are in turn supported and perpetuated by institutionalised social power relations operating within both the public and private realms of daily life. Although initially developed in the 1970s the coercive control model has more recently been re-presented in the work of Evan Stark, a prominent researcher and activist in the family violence field. In his 2007 publication, entitled "Coercive control: The entrapment of women in personal life", Stark provides an in-depth explanation of the model, expressing his concern that feminist efforts to highlight the

damage inflicted by men on their intimate partners through physical violence has tended to eclipse the impact of less visible but equally destructive forms of non-physical abuse (Stark 2007). Equally as important to Stark though is the way in which this has served to disguise the patriarchally enabled and inspired control of individual women by their male partners as these men attempt to create ‘patriarchy in miniature’ within their relationships. His work is perhaps a timely reminder that we should not lose focus upon some of the fundamental concerns of 1970s feminism.

Perhaps the most well known and best developed illustration of the coercive control model is the ‘Power and Control Wheel’ – a tool developed by the Duluth Violence Intervention Project. Now available in a number of languages, the wheel is used as an educational tool within anti-violence and consciousness raising programs throughout the western world (Yllo, 2005), and has also been used as the basis for empirical research (Shepard & Pence, 1999). It also constitutes a central component of Refuge operating and service delivery processes in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Described as a “valuable, concise framework for seeing the interconnections between violence and other forms of coercive control or control tactics” (Yllo, 2005, p. 22), the wheel links physical and sexual violence to a central hub of power and control. Radiating out from this center are eight wheel spokes, each describing a range of related control tactics; coercion and threats, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming (the victim), using children, using male privilege, economic abuse and intimidation.

Taken together, and placed within a patriarchal context, the central purpose of this range of control tactics is clearly one aimed at the maintenance of (male) domination. In the main, subscription to a feminist coercive control analysis of abuse involves, or at least implies, acceptance of the broad definition of abuse illustrated by the power and control wheel and the notions of patriarchy introduced earlier.

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



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Taken from the perspective outlined above, the coercive control model offers much to a feminist analysis of abuse against women – first and foremost in the descriptive power it provides. It provides a more than useful counter to individually focussed explanations, such as psychological explanations rooted in individual pathology and offers an alternative to sociological explanations locating the causes of violence and abuse in interpersonal conflicts. What is most important at this point however is to unpack the foregoing discussion in terms of the consequences of my adoption of this particular set of understandings for my framing of this project – what these enabled and constrained.

Perhaps the most important conclusion I had drawn at this time was that there was some ‘thing’ – some identifiable point (or points) of difference – between (and within) those who ‘made it’ out of violent relationships and those who didn’t. There was/is nothing particularly startling or remarkable about such a conclusion. Indeed the search for these magical points of difference has (and continues) to exercise the efforts of the great majority of intimate violence researchers. While acknowledging that these efforts had so far resulted in little improvement in amelioration of the phenomenon in question, it seemed to me that this was simply a case of no-one having (yet) located THE answer, rather than any real problem with the actual search parameters or indeed the question itself. So, my reasoning proceeded, if I joined this quest and could help identify why some women succeeded – and were presumably more resilient – than others, this information could be used to develop more effective intervention programs and support strategies. From the perspective of a Refuge advocate, such fostering of resilience, especially if it resulted in fewer women returning to an abusive situation, was hugely attractive. Indeed I saw no pressing reason not to follow a similar trajectory to that of many researchers before me and attempt to chase down answers to the ‘why does she stay’ question.

From a pragmatic angle informed by my Refuge work, the potential benefits of this search were twofold. Abused women could be more effectively supported, through

helping them to develop more resilient ways of dealing with ending the violence in their lives, while those working with them would also experience less stress and disappointment, given that recidivism would (presumably) lessen as a result. My increasing interest in the notion of ‘resilient survivors’ was therefore driven largely by pragmatic concerns.

Resilience explained

Pragmatism aside, I remain a little unsure exactly how the concept of resilience even crept into my vocabulary, let alone achieved the prominent theoretical position it held in my thinking at that point. I suspect this was the result of a range of factors – my academic positioning within a department encompassing social work and social policy was certainly influential. It was a concept gaining in popularity which I have vague recall of hearing and reading about frequently (in classes, readings, and in the tea room) and I do remember discussing its use in an early supervision meeting. It seemed to almost seep into consciousness as one of those ‘good ideas’ that requires little critical attention. Certainly the warm supportive way in which it was most often framed offered little overt threat, either politically or pragmatically. After all, what could be terribly problematic about supporting disadvantaged individuals to cope positively with adversity and live more independent and personally fulfilling lives, rather than remaining locked into a helpless/hopeless cycle of victimization, poverty and (state) dependence? Indeed, when thinking about the situation of many Refugee clients, the notion of promoting resilience appeared to offer promisingly solid and safe conceptual scaffolding to the support work of the organisation.

My understanding of resilience developed out of the work of a number of others, all of whom emphasized different but equally important aspects of the concept. It was written of as both internal and external to individuals, as multi-faceted, as dynamic and unpredictable, with commentators bringing these factors together in various combinations to produce theories designed to account for the way some individuals seemingly coped

with adversity more successfully than others. Resilience, as I came to understand it then, was described as;

a set of behaviors and internalized capacities.... resilience means recovering from, coping with, or overcoming adversity (Gilgun, 1999, p. 44).

and/or;

a multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses personal and environmental factors that interact in a synergistic fashion to produce competence despite adversity....the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances (Gordon, 1998, p. 1).

and/or;

a dynamic construct that.... emerges from a heterogeneity of individual and environmental influences that conspire to produce exceptional performance in the face of significant threat (Fraser, Richman & Galinsky, 1999, p. 138).

and/or;

an unpredicted or markedly successful adaptation to negative life events, trauma, stress, and other forms of risk (Fraser, Richman & Galinsky, 1999, p. 136).

In summary then, resilience can be broadly understood as the capability to ‘bounce back’, to cope with ‘life’s lessons’ and successfully adapt to or cope with ‘adverse’ or ‘difficult’ life situations. Almost an accidental discovery, the concept of resilience as currently understood was first recognised as a result of studies exploring the pathological or risk factors encountered by socially and economically disadvantaged children and adolescents. Focusing virtually exclusively upon pathology, this research aimed mainly at identification and quantification of the damage suffered by these children, in order that

appropriate educational and support services could be developed. However researchers began to notice that some children seemed to escape virtually unscathed by adverse circumstances or traumatic experiences, going on to live well-adjusted, happy and successful lives, exhibiting little evidence of the developmental disruptions evident in many others. This insight shifted attention towards identification of the protective factors at work in the lives of those less damaged (and therefore resilient) children as researchers attempted to explain such unanticipated developmental outcomes (Grotberg, 1996). Since their inception, ideas around resilience have been expanded to encompass the coping capacities of adults who have faced (or are facing) comparably challenging adverse life circumstances. Included in this group are those suffering the consequences of sexual abuse, rape, violence, mental illness, alcoholic parents, infertility and so on – extending to recovery from virtually any imaginable trauma (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson & Futrell, 1999). As was the case with earlier work focussed on youth, those researching resilience in adults have called for a re-focusing away from pathology, concentrating on developing strengths, rather than repairing weaknesses and placing an emphasis upon the active unfolding nature of the human life course. For at least one early researcher in this area

resilience best captures the active *process* of self-righting and growth that characterizes some people so essentially....resilience is not a collection of traits but a *process* that builds on itself over time (Higgins, 1994, p. 1-4 Emphasis in original).

Another, Jane Gilgun (1999) identifies an individual's agency, their will or desire to be or do something, as playing a major role in resilience processes, commenting however that this is not something that has so far been much investigated within resilience research. Through their choice of language, both of these writers attempt to communicate the active, agentic and ongoing process which they believe characterizes adult resilience.

This was a concept that seemed tailor made for my pragmatically focused purposes as I began to put shape around the project. A qualitative method using semi-structured in-

depth face-to-face interviews⁸ was chosen as the most appropriate method of data collection with the intention of gathering women's stories about how it was they had managed to exit abusive relationships – and more importantly, given the focus on resilience, what it was they felt had enabled them to subsequently maintain abuse free lives. Central at this point was the notion that by talking to women who had successfully recognised and addressed abuse in their lives (thus demonstrating 'resilience'), identification of common coping strategies could potentially reveal mechanisms by which this 'resilient attitude' could be fostered in women still enmeshed in abuse. This exploration of resilient abused women project was to be grounded firmly in women's experience (Smith, 1987, 1997). Following earlier feminist discussions of domestic violence it was a 'taken for granted' understanding that the most authoritative and authentic accounts of women's experience of abuse would come from women who have been abused (Yllo & Bograd, 1988)⁹.

Assumptions made explicit

The discussion above has been aimed at outlining the initial assumptions and understandings with which I began this project. Central to that project has been the attempt to trace how and why these ideas developed in the specific form they took at that time. While I knew (on an academic level) that these assumptions would inevitably flavour and direct my research, my political and philosophical commitments were such that their 'rightness' went largely unquestioned. In many ways, I still believe them to be so – although now only with the addition of an expansive range of 'ifs', 'buts', 'ands', and 'maybes'.

Vital to these assumptions, feminism and the notion of patriarchy were accompanied by great faith in the idea of personal (women's) lived experience as the window to understanding the effect of this form of social organisation on their lives. These grew directly from my academic work. Pivotal too were the knowledges I held of what

⁸ A comprehensive discussion around chosen methods is provided in the following chapter.

⁹ A point confirmed more recently in the work of Audrey Mullender and Gill Hague (2001).

concepts such as ‘resilience’, ‘abuse’, ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ meant, including the specific behaviours constituting each of these. Some of these also emanated from the academy, the remainder from my experience as a Refuge worker – although these sources have tended to blend in my memory. As if these did not provide sufficient complexity, I also added to the mix a veritable plethora of ‘common-sense’ ideas born out of my own experience as a wife/mother/woman.

The powerful influence which this combination exerted on the original shape of the research continues to be explored – a process I believe now could be endless. Several central assumptions grew out of my training as a Refuge worker and my experience working with victims of intimate partner abuse. Firstly, that the best (only) way to deal with an abusive relationship was to leave, a ‘knowing’ which remains influential today (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007; Yoshihoka & Choy, 2005; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). My work at Refuge had included working with women in the community – those who remained in their own homes and had not utilized the safe house. However, even with these women I (and I suspect most workers) assumed (‘knew’) that they had either already separated from their abuser and simply hadn’t required emergency shelter, or were in a process of decision-making that would eventually result in separation. The second taken-for-granted ‘knowledge’ was that few women managed to separate permanently the first time. The ‘rule of thumb’ mentioned in our training was that it could take up to 7 attempts to finally leave – and that we should take heart in this and not become discouraged at our ‘failures’. Therefore, in working with women and in framing up this project I began from a premise that leaving was an emotionally fraught, protracted, back and forth process that required significant periods of time to both achieve and recover from¹⁰. This is perhaps most vividly illustrated by my decision to restrict participation in this project to women who had been free from abuse for at least two years prior.

¹⁰ Some of the potentially problematic implications of such stereotypical understandings are clearly outlined in the work of Gill Hague (2005) and Mullender & Hague (2005).

At the time this decision was made to protect participants from being unduly traumatized by recounting of recent events. On reflection however this looks suspiciously like more of an indication of my own understandings of how the leaving process was experienced and accomplished. For instance, I was convinced by the repeated warnings in the literature that few women manage a clean break immediately. I found descriptions of potentially extended leave-return cycles (Kirkwood, 1993) and of the way in which many women go on to become involved again and again with abusive partners persuasive (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, 1998; Walker, 1984). This was/is a pattern frequently reported by those working with abuse survivors (Loseke, 1992) and certainly mirrored much of my own experience with victims of abuse. Conversely though, but an understanding I seldom applied to my Refuge work, a great many women *do not* follow either of these trajectories, successfully exiting violent circumstances and going on to lives free of abuse (Davis, 2002; Hoff, 1990; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999 & 2008). Strangely, despite this latter knowledge, both my Refuge work and the framing of this research were underpinned by a ‘worst case scenario’ attitude.

Pessimism aside, these were ideas that made a great deal of sense to me, offering an understanding congruent with both my firsthand knowledge as a Refuge worker and the accounts offered by clients of their experiences. Although their accounts were not homogeneous, many overall themes remained constant – most especially those concerned with notions of survival, coping and healing. All of this fit comfortably within the languages of feminism and resilience, opening space for me to ask my original research question:

What was it that enabled some women to free themselves from abusive relationships when so many others seemed unable to do so?

Chapter two

Method, methodology and research participants

Data gathering choices

Feeling comfortable with the broad theoretical scaffolding made explicit in chapter one, it was time to turn to questions of method – not an issue anticipated would present any particular difficulties. As this comment indicates/suggests, decisions and choices relating to specific research methods can seem almost automatic, even dictated, by particular philosophical positions (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983). In this case, my chosen topic area appeared to automatically rule out a range of potential choices. For instance, participant observation and similar strategies are considered (at least by advocates of these methods) to produce the most richly detailed information (Letherby, 2003). However, their application in the area of domestic violence is clearly restricted - both in ethical and practical terms. The use of survey instruments, while having the potential to provide useful information around incident rates and the like, was a strategy I also gave little serious consideration. Experiential strategies were also precluded without serious consideration on the grounds of both safety (to participants and researchers) and ethical issues. While this data gathering method has the potential to provide useful information around incident rates and the like, I held a strong belief that ‘good’ feminist research is, and should be, firmly grounded in the details of women’s experience (Smith, 1987, Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, Naples, 2003). To borrow from Ramazanoglu and Holland, “feminist research is politically *for* women; feminist knowledge has some grounding in women’s *experiences*, and in how it *feels* to live in unjust gendered relationships” (2002, p. 16). The detailed accounts I saw as necessary to the project certainly seemed unlikely to result from use of any closely structured data gathering instrument, hence I chose to interview women who had lived through experiences of violence and abuse.

This position was/is grounded firmly in a feminist standpoint epistemology - in the belief that it is women's experientially based accounts which offer us the best hope of obtaining the richly textured and nuanced information needed to produce accurate portrayals of women's lives (Harding 2004). At the time, I therefore interpreted this particular form of method as involving a relatively simple process of going out and talking to women who had the experience that I was interested in researching. The myriad implications contained within my largely uncritical adoption of this position remained unexamined as I began fieldwork - secure in an intuitive sense of the solidity and 'rightness' of the method selected. Face-to-face interviews presented as both the most appropriate, and in fact most viable, option available to me (Acker et al, 1983). In justifying my adoption of this position I must emphasise that it in no way signals an outright rejection of quantitative data gathering methods. Such a position would be short-sighted and merely the mirror opposite of critiques leveled at qualitative methods. As Oakley (2000) points, there is nothing inherently good or bad, or right or wrong about either side in this debate - it is the way these are used or misused that should be the subject of critique, rather than the methods themselves. In addition, as Letherby notes "...if we focus on distinct approaches and emphasize their differences we risk dividing feminist explanations into disparate positions, which is inappropriate as it implies mutual exclusivity, whereas many feminists have sympathies with aspects of each approach." (2003, p. 43). For instance, data generated via quantitative means offers great value to those working in the area of domestic abuse - most specifically in relation to questions around funding and resource allocation issues, and must therefore be retained as a vital element of research in this area. That said, data obtained via this strategy cannot help but miss or gloss over the human reality/experience underpinning the numbers and percentages - an element absolutely necessary to change-focussed feminist activism. One can scarcely expect to design effective social change strategies without insight into the ways in which these experiences feel and their effect upon people's everyday lives.

With this decision made, it then became important to determine which specific form of interviewing strategy was best suited to the topic concerned. As noted by Letherby (2003), interview-based data gathering strategies per se are a far from new idea, and apart

from extreme versions, they cannot always be clearly identified as qualitative or quantitative in nature. At one pole of the continuum for instance, quantitatively oriented research will employ rigidly structured interview schedules offering only a limited range of possible responses, with participant answers required to fit within a range predetermined by the researcher. Such research also normally requires that interviewers are carefully selected and coached to ensure that even the way questions are put remains uniform. Training in ways to limit the exchange of information with participants – in relation to the interviewer’s life, thoughts and/or opinions, and how to avoid entering into discussion around the research question itself are generally part of this coaching process (Babbie, 1995). Ideas like these were/are thought to maintain scientific detachment and objectivity and limit the possibility of researcher bias¹¹.

These ideas around scientific knowledge, particularly the notion that researchers should (or even can) aspire to a rigid objectivity and separation from both their topic area and the ‘subjects’ of their research have long been the subject of critique within both sociology and feminism. As many of these critics, including most feminist writers, point out, attempts to maintain an objective ‘scientific’ stance are impossible, given that all researchers are themselves part of the social environment under investigation. C. W. Mills, for instance, noted that “the social scientist is not some autonomous being standing outside society. No-one is outside society, the question is where he stands within it” (1959, p.204). Because of this pre-existing social positioning, there is no way to ensure researcher immunity from the range of socially constructed understandings and ‘common sense’ knowledge always and everywhere present in relation to any specific research question. By extension, there is equally little chance of eliminating the possibility of researcher bias. In relation to this project, such a strategy was clearly unworkable, most especially given my explicit commitment to a distinctly ‘biased’ political position.

At the other end of the spectrum, a purely qualitatively focussed researcher will attempt to conduct interviews with sometimes little discernible structure, using interview

¹¹ For examples see Goode and Hatté, 1952, Kahn and Cannell, 1957 or most pre-1970 research methods texts.

schedules consisting of a range of key themes or suggestions within a broad topic area. If using this style, interviewers attempt to minimise differences – particularly in relation to issues of power- between themselves and respondents. In short, every effort is made to conduct the interview as closely as possible as a conversation between equals, with research participants encouraged to guide and shape interview direction – the participatory research strategy first suggested by Ann Oakley (1981) in discussing problems and contradictions raised in her research on motherhood. At first glance this appeared the most appropriate style to adopt, but was not without its own particular set of problematics.

I was in fact reluctant to fully embrace either of these extremes. Certainly neither seemed entirely suited to the project. I realized that if I insisted on maintaining my political stance *and* yet still wanted to maintain control over the direction of the project – including some ability to direct the course of the interviews, my choices were relatively limited. The first option, given the specific research area, was rejected for a range of reasons, mainly related to the potential such a strategy contained to alienate and further traumatize participants. I was asking women to talk about relationships characterized by control, abuse and extreme power differentials. The idea that worthwhile information could be gained via a strongly controlled process seemed highly unlikely. The second position was also rejected as unsuitable, but for very different reasons. While, in theory, I wanted participants to discuss what *they* thought were the key, or most important, elements of their experience, I was nonetheless pursuing my own particular research agenda – an agenda based on *my* questions and research requirements. Therefore, what I actually required from participants were *their answers* to *my* questions. To pursue a totally free-form and unstructured interview strategy would have meant taking the risk of participants failing to address the questions I had identified as central. So, while slightly uncomfortable with the idea of controlling the content or direction of participants' narratives – a point somewhat at odds with my understanding of 'truly' feminist research, I was strongly aware of the need to maintain at least a degree of control over the interview process to protect against potential for de-railing of my research agenda.

So, with these two extremes put to one side as unsuitable or simply inappropriate, yet still sure that in-depth interviewing was the most likely method to generate rich and detailed data, the decision to adopt a mid-point strategy – semi-structured in-depth interviews, was more a matter of necessity than choice. The semi-structured format was ‘chosen’ to fulfill two main criteria. Firstly, I hoped that participants would feel more relaxed with a conversational approach and thus be more likely to engage in open and frank discussion. That the interview be conducted in a relaxed and informal manner was an important point given the intimate and potentially distressing nature of the research topic. It was also hoped that this format might encourage participants to take a proactive rather than purely reactive role in conversational direction. To ensure though that the conversation maintained its/my focus, an interview schedule¹² was prepared, consisting largely of questions related to central themes. This was designed as a general rather than prescriptive guide and aimed to ensure that central issues were at least touched upon during each interview. Using a loosely formatted interview schedule in this way allows space for participant’s words and understandings to emerge without prompting. At the same time though it must be acknowledged the interview schedule was constructed according to my understanding of domestic abuse and was therefore designed to elicit information around the questions I, rather than participants, considered of primary importance.

Ethical approval

Prior to beginning fieldwork I had been required to submit a complete research plan to Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) for approval, a process necessary for research involving human subjects. Final approval was granted following a review of the proposed research by this committee. This review explored all aspects of the project, requiring that the committee be satisfied that the research was justified, that I was proposing an academically robust research framework and that I had addressed the various ethical concerns raised by research into the lives of human subjects. The protocol approved covered such issues as participant rights, the ways in which participant

¹² See appendix C for schedule

confidentiality was to be ensured and how the safety of the participants, researcher and institution was to be protected. It included review of project documentation such as participant information sheets, consent forms and confidentiality agreements, information security protocols covering storage of and access to any information generated by the research, how this information would be used and how audiotapes and transcripts would be disposed of at the completion of the project. Final approval for the project, initially titled “Moving on: Emotional resilience in survivors of domestic abuse”, was granted in April 2001 as per PN Protocol 01/8.

Participant recruitment & consent processes

Participants for the study were self-selecting, with potential candidates responding to a range of newspaper articles, along with a brief mention of the project on a local radio station – all resulting from a press release distributed by the Massey University Corporate Communication Unit. Each article provided a brief outline of the research and included researcher contact details – potential participants were invited to communicate direct with the researcher either by telephone or post for further information.

Following initial contact, candidates were sent an information pack including a contact details form to return if they wished to participate. Around 60 replies were received and mailed this information and the first 25 forms received were selected¹³. These women were then phoned to confirm their willingness to participate and interviews were arranged at a place and time chosen by them. Because the articles were printed in only a limited range of newspapers, the women who chose to participate were drawn from a relatively compressed geographical area (Wellington to Hamilton, with a range of smaller centers between). Though geographically similar, these locations coincidentally also covered urban, provincial and rural areas, thus enabling the inclusion of women from a range of different social settings. Several women also contacted me who had been forwarded the

¹³ The decision to limit participant numbers was not made lightly however pragmatic resource constraints made this necessary. With several forms that did arrive later I contacted the women concerned and explained my reasoning to them. While uniformly disappointed with this decision, all accepted my explanation with 2 women offering to be put on a ‘back up’ list in case anyone dropped out at a later date.

information by family or friends, including one woman who entered the study after receiving a copy of the article from a local family member¹⁴. Due to a range of constraints (time, geography and finances) the initial round of interviews were carried out over a relatively compressed time period (approximately three months). Scheduling was arranged largely around geographical location in order to minimise travel.

Fieldwork

Prior to each interview participants were given an over-view of the project – aims background, intentions and so on, and were invited to ask questions pertaining to the project and my background in relation to abuse. I recognised that revealing my personal and political stance around abuse involved some risk – perhaps alienating women who did not share this perspective, or even leading to participants slanting their accounts in order to fit more closely with what they thought I wanted to hear. That said, as noted by Acker et al (1983), to not do so seemed to run counter to feminist ideals of empowerment and ran the risk of being seen as dishonest and/or manipulative by participants.

At this point participants were again offered the opportunity to withdraw from the research¹⁵ and the list of participant rights were read through and a check made that these were clearly understood. I emphasized their rights to refuse to answer any questions and to terminate their participation in the research at any time and assured them that no questions would be asked if they chose to do so. I then checked that they had no further queries regarding the process and then asked them to sign a consent form. I co-signed the document, provided one copy for the participant and retained the other for my files.

All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of participants and I began each interview by inviting the women to describe their experience of abuse and how and why they decided to end the relationship. The initial interview schedule focussed on two main

¹⁴ Although I had planned to restrict participation to women living in the North Island, this woman was particularly interested in taking part in the project. Because of resource constraints, it was decided that a telephone interview would suffice. However, a face-to-face interview became possible during a visit with her family living locally.

¹⁵ All chose to continue.

areas. The first of these concerned the process and events around actually leaving or terminating the relationship and the support structures in place at that time, for instance, who or what were these, why were these important and how did they influence decision-making processes? The second addressed the time since leaving or ending the relationship, for instance, what supports were ongoing, what did these consist of and which were felt to be important and/or useful? All of the women chose to at least begin the interview by talking at length about the abusive relationship with discussion ranging widely – themes included the ways relationships began and ended, involvement of children and/or family, interactions with police and other support agencies, discussing how the abuse had begun, their emotional responses and detailing specific violent/abusive events of abuse. Over the course of the interview some basic demographic data was gathered¹⁶, with direct questioning on these points if they did not emerge as part of the conversation. Interviews ran for between 1-3 hours with the majority lasting around 90 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in either participant's homes or those of a friend or family member, although several women (because of work pressure or for privacy or safety reasons) preferred interviews to be conducted at their workplace.

Participants

Participants came from a diverse range of backgrounds – in terms of socio-economic, educational and marital status, ranging in age from 22 to 59 years. Around half had been employed during their abuse experience and most were participating in paid work at the time of interview, although a small number (six) were surviving on various State benefits (the Domestic Purposes and Invalids benefits and Student Allowance). Those employed were working in a varied range of occupations, from customer service roles to senior administrative and public service positions. Their educational backgrounds ranged from three years of secondary schooling through to postgraduate tertiary qualifications. Around a third of the women had at least some experience of tertiary study and four were involved in university study at the time of the interviews. The abusive relationships the

¹⁶ For example, Age – currently and at the time of commencing the relationship; marital status then and currently; current relationship status; length of relationship and; time since terminating the relationship.

women described ranged in duration from three to twenty-five years, with an average length of approximately eight years. Most participants had become involved with their abuser when relatively young, between fifteen and thirty-five years of age, with an average age of twenty-one years. Seventeen women were legally married to their abusers, and all participants were cohabiting with the abusive partner when the abuse occurred. Five women were legally married at the time of our conversations, with another eight describing themselves as currently partnered. Twelve others were without a permanent or long-term partner at the time, several of these women reported having avoided intimate relationships as a result of their abuse experience. Eleven women spoke of living with violence in their families of origin, with the remaining fourteen describing childhoods free from abuse. Most were mothers, with between one and five children, although six women had, for one reason or another, remained childless. The majority described themselves as being of either Pakeha or New Zealand European ethnicity, with six women identifying as Maori. With the exception of one respondent who identified herself as lesbian (experiencing abuse from both male and female partners), all identified as heterosexual – currently, and at the time of the abuse. Only three participants reported contact with Refuge services, however the majority (sixteen and twenty-one respectively) recounted involvement with police and medical practitioners. I did not intend to apply any direct or systematic comparisons on the basis of this demographic information but I was conscious of the possibility that the women's experiences could have been shaped or influenced by their cultural and/or social differences. I therefore decided it would be prudent to gather information sufficient to allow me to explore differences if they arose.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were returned to participants¹⁷ for amendment or removal of information they did not want used in any documentation arising from the project¹⁸. Participants were also invited to offer further comment or explanation if they wished to do so – most elected to either not do so or made only minor alterations. A letter sent with the transcripts told participants that if they were happy with these they need not be returned. Fourteen women did not return their transcripts and, of

¹⁷ With the exception of one woman who had no wish to review the transcript of her interview.

¹⁸ All potentially identifying information such as names, locations, highly specific incidents and so on were removed to protect participant safety and confidentiality.

these, eleven replied with letters confirming that they were satisfied, with six of these also including brief discussion of their reflections since the interview.

Follow-up interviews

Following initial thematic analysis, participants were invited to take part in a follow-up interview. This round of interviews, conducted with eight participants, was carried out using the same format as the initial series. The only major difference lay in a more tightly focused interview schedule designed to elicit clarification and expansion of issues and/or points raised during the first interview. The areas concentrated on here were the details around interactions with various support structures utilized by participants and why they had identified these as more or less important and/or helpful. The main focus was upon their reactions to the help or support received as I hoped to be able to gain a clearer picture of not only what had been effective but also why. These interviews were generally somewhat shorter in duration, averaging around forty-five minutes. Each was audio-taped and then transcribed before being returned to participants for comment and/or amendment. All eight women returned their transcripts from this round of interviews with only minor alterations, mainly around points of clarification. An interview schedule was not prepared for this second round of interviews. Instead I used notes of questions generated as I had listened to the tapes and read the transcripts of their initial interviews.

Initial analysis: An emerging problem

I had been vaguely aware throughout the fieldwork phase of the project of a sense that participants were not addressing (at least as closely as I would have liked) the topic area introduced as each interview began – their post-abuse experience. That said, because my intention had been to encourage participants to be proactive in the interview, I was loathe to be any more directive than was necessary to ensure attention to my original research agenda. In the beginning I attributed this problem to poor interviewing skills, choosing to persevere and assuming/hoping that further experience would resolve the issue.

In hindsight, the best course would have been to call a halt to fieldwork when the issue surfaced in initial analysis of the first couple of interviews – an option that simply did not occur to me at the time. Another strategy would have been to allow a little more time for reflection between each interview. In this way I would have created space to allow a more searching investigation of what was potentially creating the difficulty – or even whether it was an important problem. However, several factors made consideration of this latter course problematic. As noted above, many participants lived a considerable distance from Palmerston North and this, coupled with time and financial constraints, demanded careful scheduling of interviews according to geographic location in order to enable each area to be covered within a fairly short time – generally over the course of a three day weekend. This resulted in a return from fieldwork weekends with up to six lengthy interviews and as I had undertaken to return transcripts to participants quickly, the transcription process took priority.

By extension, concentrated interviewing and transcribing meant that little time remained for anything other than cursory preliminary analysis. Therefore, while each interview received a number of readings during the fieldwork phase, these readings were – in the main – superficial and there was little opportunity for the level of engagement necessary to identify problematic issues. In effect, the fieldwork process meant that for several months I was largely immersed in participants' stories, either actively talking with the women, transcribing their interviews or reading (and re-reading) interview transcripts – with little space available for more abstract theoretical reflection. While this process of immersion is recommended by advocates of most qualitative research methods (Tolich & Davidson, 1999), in this instance its influence was less than helpful. The 'closeness' made critical reading of the stories difficult – indeed, seemingly impossible – a process complicated further by an understanding of a feminist standpoint research framework that seemed to demand acceptance of such narratives as unproblematic (and largely unquestioned) descriptions of women's experiential reality. Adding to this complication was a sense of loyalty and debt that I felt towards the women who had so generously given of their time and emotional energy in recounting their experiences – thus creating

resistance on my part to the notion of reading or hearing their stories as anything other than straight-forward and accurate accounts.

The extent of the problem however only reached a coherent level of intelligibility and clarity during further analysis, with the realization that while the interview data did address in some way my original research area, their post-abuse experience was far from being a vital or central area of interest to participants. This realization meant that I was suddenly faced with a range of important decisions and choices. My starting point however - acknowledging that the data as gathered did not provide sufficient material related to the original questions, was unavoidable.

Such an acknowledgement though was hugely problematic in that it would inevitably (and severely) restrict any potential for in-depth analysis or comment – at least in relation to the original research questions. Any attempt to avoid or sidestep this recognition however would require that I do significant violence to participants' stories in order to force their words into my research framework. Such a course was simply not an option. Such 'choices' brought another equally large issue to the fore as I was confronted with the question of what could be done to salvage the data gathered – data which I knew to be rich, even if not in my preferred area. To simply abandon the investment of time and energy already committed by both myself and participants seemed untenable. In an attempt to stave off this possibility I turned yet again to the women's accounts, searching for a recovery strategy. This time however I approached the data aiming to avoid (as much as was humanly possible) any pre-determined agenda, reading participants' narratives as simply that – accounts of significant or memorable experiences of living through abuse.

Once I returned to a more inductive reading of the transcripts and thus (somewhat ironically) assumed a more orthodox feminist research strategy - beginning from women's experience and accounts and allowing these to guide the research (Acker et al., 1983; Smith, 1987), my questions around the validity of my original research agenda were quickly answered. 'Resilience' and post-abuse life were simply not topics of

importance for these women. It was then a matter of returning once more to the interview tapes and transcripts in order to gain an understanding of participants' priorities – rather than my own. Following this process, the project assumed a hugely altered shape. I now began to ask questions concerned with the relationship between shame and abuse: Why and how was shame so closely linked to the experience of abuse? Did a sense of shame influence and/or shape the women's responses to the abuse in their lives? How did shame even become linked to victimization in the first place?

The 'Self' as researcher

Explanation of why and how this (seemingly dramatic) shift occurred requires introduction at this point of other processes underway concurrent to my re-reading of participants' narratives. The first of these, theoretical reading, is a routine element of academic research. The others, reflecting on my emotional responses to the research process and the way I dealt with these, was/is far more personal in nature – and also it emerged, perhaps the most important. Description of the bouncing backwards and forwards process between and among these three quite different but intertwined positions over this time will inevitably be 'messy'. All can be isolated as 'stand alone' aspects and described in a linear and tidy fashion. To do so however would represent a 'sanitizing' or simplifying of what was, in reality, a complex and often extremely untidy process. So, what follows will be an attempt to articulate the way these activities interacted and connected as the project evolved.

Perhaps the most importance influence during the early stages of analysis was one that remained hidden from me for an extended period of time. The accounts offered by the women detailed often extreme cruelty and violence – and their telling was, for most of the women, even those speaking of events many years earlier, a massively intense emotional experience. Some were angry, others sad, many were bewildered or puzzled. For virtually all it was a tearful time. Responses such as these were not unexpected. Anticipation of these issues had been the focus of some discussion with my research supervisors prior to commencing fieldwork and various strategies to address emotional

and psychological safety issues for both participants and myself had been included in my application to MUHEC. These strategies involved making contact with local Refuges and women's support agencies in each area to ensure that support was available to women if their participation caused ongoing distress. Lists of these agencies, along with discussion of the services on offer were provided to participants. Any personal support requirements were to be addressed through my existing networks within the Refuge movement.

With these measures in place, in addition to my experience as a Refuge worker, I felt confident in my ability to deal with any issues that were likely to arise for myself or participants during the course of the fieldwork. This confidence – particularly in relation to my own self-care strategies, was to prove misplaced – although recognition of this was slow in coming. When it did however, its impact upon the direction of the research was dramatic.

The actual organisation of the fieldwork schedule was hugely influential in what was to follow, although the implications escaped me at that time. After beginning fieldwork with locally based interviews, covering most of these at a rate of around three per week over a month long period, I scheduled four weekends in reasonably quick succession to cover groups of participants in areas some distance from Palmerston North. The first two of these (successive) weekends were the lightest – each with three interviews over three days, the second (two weeks later) involved three interviews over four days, and the final group (three weeks later) was the heaviest, with five interviews over three days. Between traveling, interviewing and transcribing interview tapes, this schedule effectively meant that for several months my life consisted of little more than hearing and reading intensely emotional stories of violence and abuse.

In retrospect, there was a degree of misplaced confidence involved in my thinking that this would be a manageable fieldwork schedule. At the time however, the focus was single-mindedly upon getting the fieldwork phase of the research completed and a rapid deterioration in my own emotional well-being (again in retrospect) went unattended. While I did notice a growing sense of depression over this period, I did not spend a great

deal of time or effort exploring its cause – attributing it to general stress and tiredness and anticipating this to lift once fieldwork was completed. I followed the safety and self-care guidelines I had set up in my human ethics committee application, using Refuge trained supervisors to ‘debrief’ following each set of interviews.

My expectation of an improvement in mood proved overly optimistic however and the ongoing depression played out in a virtually total withdrawal from the research over the next few months in a way I had not expected. I found myself unwilling/unable to engage with the interview material in anything other than a superficial fashion – strongly resisting reading transcripts or listening to tapes and restricting work on my research to academic reading. I also found myself experiencing huge anxiety at even the thought of contact with participants. This finally became something I could not ignore when I found myself leaving what was clearly a returned transcript unopened on my desk for several weeks – literally unable to open the envelope. At this point my focus began to shift and I became more interested in understanding my emotional response to the project¹⁹.

These responses, while not readily comprehensible initially were, on reflection, clearly related to issues of self-worth or self-image across a range of quite disparate but interconnected fronts, all resulting though in a sense of shamefulness around my own personal performance. Much of this sense of shamefulness related to my own sense of competency as a researcher, particularly upon recognition that participants were not responding directly to my questions, but also around my seeming inability to ‘handle’ or detach myself from the details of abuse in participants’ stories. The first set of concerns led me to question whether or not what I was doing was even valid academic research! I recalled at this point having read Wendy Hollway’s (1989) account of the way in which this and similar questions had tortured her early in her research career and empathized in a most discomfiting way. Also at issue were my interviewing skills and whether what I was doing constituted a ‘correct’ interviewing technique, especially given the

¹⁹ The issue of the emotional impact of researching in ‘sensitive’ and/or emotionally charged areas such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, or areas in which the researcher has some personal experience and/or investment has recently begun to feature more frequently in methodological discussions. See, for example, R. Campbell (2002), K. Gilbert (2001), K. Rager (2005) & E. Wincup (2001).

conversational informal style I had chosen. While this format is now firmly established as a key feature of much feminist qualitative research (Leatherby, 2003), I found myself questioning the very basis of my choice – wondering if it was sufficiently structured or ‘rigorous’ enough to qualify as a legitimate research method (Hollway, 1989). I wondered too if my failure somehow signaled a lack of adequate academic preparation on my part. In short, was I ‘up to’ this entire PhD researcher role or was I simply pretending – playing a fraudulent part?

These points all led me to attribute participants’ lack of ‘buy in’ to my questions to a failure on my part – a failure that played out through a sense of shame around my professional competency. Also contributing to this sense of failure was my inability to deal in an ‘objective’ and unemotional way to the participants’ detailed accounts of cruelty and violence. Because of my experience as a Refuge advocate – including extensive time spent listening to just such stories, I had believed myself more than adequately prepared for whatever participants’ stories might contain. What I had not allowed for here however was the entirely different context of these ‘hearings’. In my role as a Refuge advocate I was positioned in an explicit support role – able and authorized to adopt a proactive stance in comforting victims and suggesting options and strategies. Quite apart from the support this afforded clients, it also had the effect of providing an automatic coping mechanism for me. I was ‘allowed’ to share clients’ anger and outrage at their victimization. I was ‘allowed’ to be sad and cry with them. In short – empathy, and demonstration of this empathy, within professional boundaries, were encouraged within the Refuge context. Detachment and objectivity were, in fact, seen as demonstration of ‘burn out’ - interpreted as a stress induced inability to engage with clients and a signal of the need for ‘time out’.

On the other hand though, in this particular context, I was attempting to play the traditional/orthodox researcher role as set down in the stringent and systematic scientific methods of my undergraduate study texts (e.g. Babbie 1995). Following this model, my position throughout the interviewing process had been almost entirely passive. From a traditional interviewer stance I believed I had no authority to do more than listen – and

thus had no outlet for my emotional responses to their stories. This ‘researcher role’, and it must be emphasized that this was *my* interpretation, seemed to require that I hold myself apart from participants – in a sense ‘distancing’ myself from them. While aware of the impossibility of total objectivity (Hoff, 1988), I had still done my best to avoid ‘contamination’ of participants’ accounts – trying to avoid offering interpretation or personal comment during our conversations and sidestepping wherever possible any questions around my own personal politics in relation to abuse. Therefore, while my feminist background gave me a way to justify empathizing with participants, the way in which I interpreted my role as a ‘professional researcher’ made this a largely reactive empathy, with little opportunity or legitimation for the offer of any proactive assistance. Given my sense of ‘fraudulence’ around my positioning as a legitimate academic researcher, this led me to feel that I had been re-abusing participants in cruelly requesting a rehearsal of hugely painful events in their lives, from a ‘dodgy’ professional position and with no offer of any substantial help or support. Certainly I began to feel I had in a way abused their trust – somehow tricking or ‘conning’ them into sharing their stories, through playing the part of a professionally trained researcher – training I now distrusted myself - but which nonetheless conferred a degree of status. I also had a vague suspicion that I had somehow traded on my gender position – making use of gender solidarity by presenting myself as an empathetic supportive woman, exploiting this to mine details of closely held painful secrets. In effect, I came to feel that what I had done could be seen as little more than a prurient, even voyeuristic, intrusion into intensely personal traumatic events – and with an almost spurious set of justifications.

Given that my emotional responses were ‘playing out’ through a sense of uncertainty and lessening sense of self-worth, it seemed likely that they were somehow shame-based. This largely intuitive conclusion, an intuition informed and shaped by my feminist sociological background, constituted a crucial turning point in the research, leading me into exploration of the (scarce) sociological literature around shame and embarrassment. The dramaturgical work of Erving Goffman (1959, 1968a & 1968b) around stigma and management of self in interaction was important here – for two reasons. His work offered a plausible account of *my* emotional responses to the research – especially the need to be

seen as competent in my role as researcher and the interactional strategies involved in establishing and maintaining my competency status. Equally as important though, the processual model of mortification of the self he put forward seemed a (more than) tidy fit with many of the abusive processes and emotional responses given voice in the women's stories.

However, when analysis resumed from this somewhat altered perspective, it became apparent to me that not only did I need to engage with the sociological work around emotion, I also needed to explore the implications of combining this work with the feminist standpoint methodology I'd employed in setting up the project initially. Crucial to this process was a more sophisticated exploration of the 'workings' (and internal implications) of this chosen methodological strategy. The realization (belatedly) dawned upon me that this was more than a convenient label for a particular set of qualitative data-gathering strategies, but instead was a well-developed theoretical position in its own right (Crasnow, 2008). Indeed, it constituted the taken-for-granted theoretical underpinnings of virtually all of the feminist abuse/violence research I was encountering and was in some ways the very source of the political strength of this work. Paradoxically though, attachment to this same (powerful) feminist standpoint also seemed responsible in large part for many of the problems, lacks and contradictions I was noticing in myself and my reactions. I was beginning to harbor niggling doubts around the capability of dominant feminist understandings of abuse to contain or explain the multiplicity of accounts participants were offering me.

I also experienced more niggling doubts around the 'legitimacy' of attempting to link this work with Goffman's interactionist perspective. His work has been soundly criticized by feminist commentators as gender blind at best – a critique I found it difficult to dispute. Nonetheless his work resonated strongly with the women's accounts (and my own emotional responses) and thus presented as an attractive analytic device. That said, I still felt a powerful attachment to the feminist standpoint accounts informing my understanding of my research topic, despite the contradictions and absences I was encountering with undeniable regularity as I worked with participants' stories. These then

were issues loudly demanding explicating and analysis in their own right. Before I could abandon either conceptual framing (a strategy I was loathe to embrace) – or chase down a way in which to tie them together – I needed to explore exactly what it was that was missing from or dissonant within the standpoint analyses of violence and abuse underpinning my work.

Critique of feminist analyses of abuse

For instance, the coercive control model remains powerfully influential within contemporary feminist analyses of abuse (Stark 2007). In terms of its basic elements, it constitutes perhaps *the* central unifying strand of most feminist analyses of abuse. As outlined earlier, the coercive control model offers much to a feminist analysis of abuse against women – first and foremost in the descriptive power it provides. It is, however, vulnerable to critique and presented difficulties in analytically framing the stories I was hearing from participants. While some of the ideas fit, some of the time, for some of the women, it failed to offer the seamlessly smooth account I had (perhaps naively) anticipated.

Several issues present as problematic – not least that the broad theory, despite its grounding in social power relations, retains an unfortunately individualistic focus²⁰ when applied in a pragmatic sense, for instance, in use of the power and control wheel as a therapeutic or interventionist tool. Questions of social responsibility, either in addressing the issue or in terms of any liability for the perpetuation of ongoing abuse, are largely bracketed aside, with attention firmly trained upon the abused individual or interactions within abusive dyads. I am not suggesting here that this is in any way a deliberate attempt to avoid questions of social responsibility but rather that the efforts of those working with victims (and perpetrators) are inevitably focussed on shifting individual attitudes and behaviours. It is unreasonable to demand that they do otherwise; social change arguably lies outside the scope of any therapeutic or supportive relationship. Nonetheless such an

²⁰ The way in which Evan Stark (2007) conceptualizes this concept is an important but relatively uncommon exception.

approach means that individual responsibility remains the point of emphasis and, by default, the task of dealing with the abuse and its consequences falls once more to the victim. This particular point sat uneasily with my increasing recognition of the need to move away from such individually focused ‘fixes’. Certainly my growing suspicion of the clearly social genesis of the emotional responses recounted by participants was a very poor fit with theory located (disguised or not) in notions of individual responsibility.

Secondly, the model tends to speak primarily to the causes of (gendered) abuse and violence and the ways in which these are perpetrated. Little attention is, or in fact can be, given to the lived embodied experience of abuse. How it ‘feels’ to be abused, including its emotional content, is problematic (if not impossible) from a coercive control perspective. It appeared to me that if I intended to retain my focus on exploring abuse from an experiential perspective, this framework was largely restricted to description of mechanical elements of abusive processes and (very) broad social context.

My third point is closely related to the notion of context mentioned above. Because the focus of this theoretical framework is trained firmly upon gender and gendered power relations, other contextual issues tend to be treated as background, rather than crucially important social scaffolding in their own right. Concentration upon gender as *the* point of commonality tends to obscure differences both between women and between their experiences of abuse – differences that may well owe more to factors other than gender in terms of their structuring influence (Yllo, 2005). As hinted at by some participants in this research, ethnicity and socioeconomic status appeared to have been factors differentiating their experiences in terms of their access to support and resources and even perhaps their knowledge and understandings about what resources and support they were legitimately able to access. The importance of contextualising factors other than gender is an issue pointed out by Crenshaw who comments that

although violence is a common issue among women, such violence usually occurs within a specific context – that often varies considerably depending on the race, class, and other social characteristics of the

woman... These characteristics can be better understood and addressed through a framework that links them to broader structures of subordination which intersect sometimes in fairly predictable ways (1994, p.15).

The fourth point of issue, the way the model tends to set up 'proper' ways of being abused, is perhaps even more important in terms of this project. Given my growing interest in the emotional content, particularly shame, of abusive experiences, anything which worked to set up the possibility of failure and/or inadequacy was of considerable concern. This framework, developed and used to explain how abuse occurs, is ironically also responsible for actively creating/constructing specific sets of understandings of what constitutes abuse, what defines an abusive relationship, and even how one goes about becoming a victim of abuse. Part and parcel of this constitutive process is the creation of a range of stereotypical images accompanying each of these sets of 'knowledge'. Thus we see the development of identity scripts, sets of spoken and unspoken understandings prescribing how one 'does' abuse, or victim, or survivor, and so on. As a result alternative ways of 'being' or 'doing' are automatically proscribed and may even be seen as illegitimate. Unless performing the role in the 'correct' way, one may be seen as not a 'proper' victim, indeed, may well be seen as not being abused at all. These were issues that were raised by participants on many occasions as they noted their discomfort around 'not fitting' into the (stated and unstated) ways of being that they felt were expected of them as victims of abuse.

Finally, one of the most important dissonances within this framework in relation to participants' accounts is the way its proponents tend to concentrate primarily upon physical and sexual violence. While careful to acknowledge other forms of abuse, their work tends to focus upon those more tangible and observable forms. The Duluth power and control wheel, for instance, locates a range of emotional and psychological abuse tactics *within* an outer rim of physical and sexual violence, thus implicitly placing these as mere components or as a 'subset' of more serious violence. This was an issue participants returned to repeatedly throughout their accounts, with many talking of how they wished they had been hit, or hit more often – with visible signs of assault.

I actually wished that I'd had the black eyes, because he was very good when he hurt me - when he physically hurt me. I didn't, I didn't get all the bruising and there were a lot of times I wished I did. It's really hard to tell someone else, people at Social Welfare it was at the time, I'm being abused...because I didn't have any real evidence of it. To tell, [caseworker] - I am being abused, I am being sexually abused, do you understand? My stomach is absolutely - I'm in agony because I had to spend the last, you know, twenty-four hours holding on to urine. I'm in agony with that. My hair - my head's really sore 'cause I've been hauled around my house. I've been spat at. I feel like a big hunk of dirt. I'm being abused. But I didn't have any bruises (Miriam).

Not only did many feel that (repeated) bruising and/or injury would legitimate their abuse claims – they would ‘fit’ the abuse victim profile - many were also clear in their belief that psychological and emotional abuse was both more painful and more difficult to recover from than physical assault – a point strongly emphasized by bell hooks (1988) and illustrated by the following words from Julie.

He was really aggressive...sexually as well, mentally, emotionally, the whole lot, in one. Well you know some say ‘well it’s horrible getting beaten up’ but it’s worse with mental abuse and it lasts more ‘cos the scars are inside. And you know sometimes I wish that I could just get slapped around – because it’s better than mental abuse (Julie).

Further influences: Battered woman syndrome, the cycle of violence, learned helplessness and the intergenerational cycle of violence

Although perhaps lacking the influence of previous times, some elements of Lenore Walker’s battered woman syndrome (as explicated in Chapter one), specifically the ‘cycle of violence’ and ‘learned helplessness’, have become very much part of both

academic and commonsense theories surrounding abuse in New Zealand and, despite intensive critique continue to inform stereotypical images of abuse and abuse victims. As Berns & Schweingruber (2007) note, many of the understandings and explanations of domestic violence produced during the 1970s remain active within popular/everyday discourse today. They also exerted a strongly shaping (unacknowledged) influence upon my own initial understandings of these concepts. One of Walker's key concepts, the cycle of violence, has also been effectively appropriated by researchers more concerned with the intergenerational transmission of violence than the dynamics of abuse as such. Their perspective, grounded in the social learning theory of Bandura (1973 & 1977), suggests that abuse is a learnt process passed down through families and is thus potentially amenable to change. As noted earlier, this is not surprisingly presents an attractive and popular approach for those interested in promoting personal responsibility and a practical change-focussed action. At this time I was intently focussed on producing work that would be of pragmatic use in the anti-violence field and was thus happy to accept membership of that group. However, that said, I came to realise it was also a set of ideas offering little by way of either description or explanation of the lived/embodied experience of abuse. As with the models mentioned above, it is largely restricted to discussion of causal factors and potential interventions. As also discussed in chapter one, it is also potentially harming to victims as they find themselves blamed for their own victimisation, with mothers (generally victims) subjected to social norms mandating it as their responsibility to educate and protect their children (Mullender & Morley, 1994) *and* maintain the (heterosexual nuclear) family unit. Within the context of an abusive relationship, these demands become literally impossible, making failure on one or all counts inevitable. As with the coercive control model, the social learning framework also tends to bracket aside questions of social responsibility in favour of interventions targeted at individuals. In this instance though, the primary intervention targets become the children of victims and perpetrators with efforts concentrated on helping children re-learn and undo their abusive history in the hope they will not perpetuate their parents behaviour.

Overall issues

While all of the conceptualizations discussed hold specific difficulties and vulnerabilities, these are perhaps not the most central issue. Also of significant concern is the way elements of these popular models come together in discourse, creating the identity scripts noted above. These bring with them their contradictions and discordances, along with the various stereotypical images inevitably attached to each model. For instance, the passive (mentally deficient) victim of battered woman syndrome; the brave survivor; the pitiful victim of a powerful male abuser; the resourceful mother protecting her children from the cycle of violence; the neglectful mother who fails to do this. All come together within a virtual mish mash of abuse discourse and offer up an inherently contradictory and conflicting range of possible understandings and ‘ways of being’ for those experiencing abuse. Simultaneously these all contribute to the overall ‘picture’ of what the experience of abuse is – both for those on the inside, in terms of how to ‘do’ the experience of abuse, and for those standing outside attempting to understand how this is ‘being done’ (Dunn, 2004; Loseke, 2003; Berns, 2004). In terms of this particular project, it is these issues and their consequences for those experiencing abuse that constitute the central concerns and the discussion above suggests that the confusion and contradiction noted by so many participants has a readily discernible foundation. Indeed it would be entirely reasonable to suggest that anything other than confusion would be surprising for women embodying a range of utterly incompatible positions as they went about their daily lives.

Theoretically then, what was required to allow me to move forward with the project was some way to reconcile these issues, retain the vital connection to women’s lived experiences of abuse *and* somehow accommodate the confusion, chaos and emotional turmoil beginning to emerge from participants’ accounts. Fortunately, Dorothy Smith’s description of (her version of) feminist standpoint as a tool “to analyze the merits and problems of feminist theoretical work that sought a radical break with existing disciplines through locating knowledge or inquiry in women’s standpoint or in women’s experience” (1987, p. 392), hinted at a potential path through this dilemma. What this seemed to suggest to me was that beginning from the lived reality of women who had experienced

abuse did *not* necessitate uncritical adoption of any one set of understandings, but instead enabled exploration of these *from* an experiential base. So, rather than fitting/forcing participants' accounts into any particular framework, focus would move towards the way these conceptual framings themselves operated to actively structure or construct the experiences recounted. Clearly however such a shift also entailed a far closer examination of the epistemological underpinnings of feminist standpoint theory.

Occupying a feminist standpoint

To begin then, borrowing from Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002), to take a feminist standpoint;

means being able to produce the best current understandings of how knowledge of gender is interrelated with women's experiences and the realities of gender. Knowledge can be produced from a feminist standpoint wherever women live in unequal gendered social relationships, and can develop a feminist political consciousness. It is a way of exploring (as opposed to assuming) how women experience life differently from men, or intersexuals, or others, because they live in specific social relationships to the exercise of male power (p. 60-1).

This position offers a potentially valuable corrective to the masculinist bias of modernist discourse/ social theory. The absence and/or misinterpretation of women's lives, knowledges and experiences, and thus the invisibility of gendered social power relations within accounts of human (man's) social history is a well established, indeed virtually routine element of feminist critiques of mainstream social theory. Most feminist effort, whether historical or contemporary, academic or community based, has been overwhelmingly expended in working to expose the consequences of these silences and distortions for women in the context of the day-to-day realities of their lives. It was/is the attempt to theorize these lived experiences which provided the initial impetus for

development of feminist standpoint theory (Crasnow 2006)²¹. Empirical versions of this work took the commonsense approach that if one desired knowledge of a particular social phenomenon, for instance, childbirth or motherhood, then it seemed only logical to seek information from those with direct lived experience – in this case mothers. Similarly, knowledge of rape and violence, or at least the knowledge of how it was/felt to be the victims of these, could come only from those who had lived the experience – victims of rape and violence. Such efforts resonated relatively harmoniously with a feminist political stance and provided a solid foundation for much feminist consciousness raising and political activism.

This ‘commonsense’ position found support too in the context of challenges to Western feminism by Black, third world and postcolonial feminists, intent upon demonstrating the inadequacy of the dual systems approach taken by socialist feminists, focusing upon patriarchy and capitalism (Naples, 2003). In the main these critiques centred on the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism and the ways in which this often operated to render differences between women invisible and/or even unspeakable. As was pointed out, the experiences, understandings and political priorities of one particular group of women – for instance, white middleclass women, did not (and could not) translate directly into/onto – or even describe adequately, the lives and experiences of all women. Attempts to do so, it was argued, while perhaps challenging some patriarchal power relations between men and women, served only to maintain and perpetuate similar relationships of domination and oppression between diverse groups of women. While patriarchy and capitalism may well have constituted the key problematics in the lives of white middleclass feminists, racism and colonization were far more pressing issues for many women of color. What was suggested by way of remedy was the need to attend carefully to the differing standpoints of these groups (Hill-Collins, 1986).

²¹ Accounts of this development can be found in 1997 articles by Susan Hekman, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill-Collins, originally published in the journal *Signs* 22(2) and later reprinted in *The feminist Standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. S. Harding. (2004). New York, Routledge

Ironically though, it was/is attempts to address this problem – to avoid universalizing tendencies and therefore accommodate women’s diversity, which exposes standpoint research/theory to further critiques of essentialism and/or relativism (Hekman, 1997; Mason, 2002; Pinnick, 2005). In relation to the first point, it was argued that theory dependant upon the notion of ‘woman/women’, or grounded in the experiences of this (now questionable) category was unavoidably essentialist. To argue that one could research and write of ‘women’ and ‘women’s experience’ not only constituted the implicit claim that these categories existed independently of both researchers’ and respondents’ accounts of them (Stanley, 1990), but also positioned the category ‘women’ as somehow epistemically privileged (Hekman, 1997). From the perspective of social constructionist and poststructuralist critics, this was/is simply an untenable claim, betraying standpoint theorists’ unfortunate attachment to modernist notions of a pre-social, a priori reality; a single ‘truth’, ‘out there’ simply awaiting discovery and description. To the contrary they argued, such a reality did not exist outside our accounts – was simply inaccessible (and therefore, by extension, logically non-existent) outside language. Acceptance of this position also entailed, it was argued, acknowledgement of multiple, eternally fluid and contingent ‘truths’. From this position then, any appeal to fixed categories – a singular truth such as woman, was tenuous at best, destined to inevitably founder in a morass of multiplicity and contingency; a radical relativism or, worse, be appealing to a foundationist understanding of knowledge (Hekman, 1997; Stanley, 1990).

Of course, according to the more purist advocates of the postmodern perspective, this fluidity and instability was/is an entirely positive conclusion, a position finally accepting of the ultimately inaccessible and scientifically unknowable nature of any and all aspects of human existence. As has been pointed out by feminist commentators though, critiques such as these caricature the position occupied by feminist standpoint theorists (Smith, 1997; Crasnow, 2006), most of whom would instead draw attention to the way these

criticisms rely upon a “dichotomised understanding of the positions available: one has to be *either* relativist *or* foundationist.” (Stanley & Wise 1990, p. 41)²².

Speaking from a sociological perspective, Stanley and Wise are feminist standpoint theorists who refute charges of either essentialism or relativism, holding fast to a commitment to a feminist political stance and explaining their refusal of such critiques in terms of central tenets of mainstream sociological thought. They take as their starting point an acknowledgement and acceptance of the sociological premise that all social categories, for instance ‘women’ or ‘men’, are socially constructed. What they are concerned with is the task of unpacking how these are constituted, but in a way which does not lose sight of the inhabitation of these categories by actual people – all of whom live and breathe *and* identify themselves as sexed as well as gendered persons (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 40). Use then, they argue, of such groupings in no way entails an appeal to or acceptance of any essential qualities or underpinnings to these categories.

As signaled above, they also vehemently reject descriptions of standpoint research as radically relativist, defining their use of relativism instead as “an insistence that, although there is ‘truth’, judgments of truth are always and necessarily made relative to the particular framework or context of the knower” (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 40). This is similar to the argument advanced by Elizabeth Grosz (1987) which presents relativism as an acknowledgement that different material realities do exist and that while these may overlap they are not coterminous.

Similar accusations, but couched in slightly different terms see extreme relativism reframed as radical individualism²³ – the argument that “a focus on less than large collectivities or categories means staying in a pre- or non-social sphere” (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 43) – and is a charge equally strongly rejected. These critiques are based on the contention that it is impossible to generate feminist (indeed any) knowledge(s) based

²² Other feminist standpoint theorists have adopted a differing pathway, embracing many elements of postmodern and/or poststructuralist thought while rejecting accusations of relativism (e.g. Haraway 1991 & Harding 2004).

²³ In addition, as pointed out by Sharon Crasnow (2006), feminist standpoint theory does not claim absolute privilege by or for any specific individual standpoint.

upon the experiences of individuals. Stanley and Wise refute such charges, contending that the genesis of these claims can be attributed in part to these collectivist preoccupations of mainstream social sciences. This comment is aimed at the fixation of (particularly) modernist social scientists with categorizing and aggregating individual human activity and interaction with an eye to providing generaliseable (and ultimately universal) scientific explanations – objectively verifiable knowledge/truth. From such a position single instances of individual behaviour, or individuals’ accounts of these, cannot be seen as indicative of anything more than subjective experience. Broader understanding then must necessarily be constructed upon collection and objective scientific study of multiple instances in order to avoid the slippery slope into absolute subjectivism²⁴ and theoretical chaos. However, Stanley & Wise argue, since sociology has long accepted that “... ‘individuals’ do not exist except as socially located beings” (1990, p. 43), it should not be considered problematic to suggest that understanding of the social structures within which people live and the categories organising these can be identified or ‘recovered’ from analysis of the accounts of specific individuals in particular material circumstances.

These women, along with countless others²⁵, are working to theoretically justify their adamant refusal to jettison a feminist politics – a politics (and a language) seemingly destabilized, if not rendered untenable by a wholehearted acceptance of social constructionist and poststructuralist critiques. For, it is argued from such a perspective, if one’s constituency, the very audience and justification of one’s position, is theoretically dissolved²⁶, what then remains to support calls for social change – the very basis of the women’s movement? How is one to support arguments of ‘good’, ‘right’ and/or ‘just’ – central elements of feminist arguments, at all?²⁷ Indeed, from such a position, any

²⁴ Recent work by Alison Wylie (2004) and Sandra Harding (2004) both acknowledge and address concerns relating to questions of objectivity and subjectivity within feminist standpoint theory.

²⁵ See, for instance, Sharon Crasnow 2006, Sandra Harding 2004, and Alison Wylie (2004).

²⁶ A well developed illustration of this particular line of critique can be found in Hekman, S. (1997). Truth and method. Feminist standpoint theory revisited. Originally published in the journal *Signs* 22(2): 341-365, this article was later reprinted in *The feminist Standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. S. Harding. (2004). New York, Routledge: 225-241.

²⁷ Such questions were at the centre of a series of strongly adamant responses to Susan Hekman’s 1997 critique (as noted in the point above). The ensuing debate, with contributions from leading feminist standpoint theorists Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill-Collins and Nancy Hartsock was

suggestion of a political stance becomes nothing more than a matter of personal opinion/belief. Such depoliticisation is antithetical to the original aims of the feminist movement and must be resisted as strongly as possible (Stanley, 1990). Another to argue strongly that such accusations seriously misrepresent the arguments of feminist standpoint theorists is Sharon Crasnow (2006) who points to the work of Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill-Collins in support of her point.

As Stanley argues, feminist researchers are centrally concerned with questions of knowledge, power, and the linkages between these, making their agenda inherently (and, she believes, entirely desirably) political and focused upon social change. What links an otherwise vastly diverse group of researchers together is,

...a continuing shared commitment to a political position in which 'knowledge' is not simply defined as 'knowledge *what*' but also as 'knowledge *for*'. Succinctly the point is to change the world, not only to study it (1990, p. 15).

Questions of power and knowledge, rooted as they are in the material world are far from inconsequential to the ways in which we live our everyday lives. They are in fact inextricably linked, constituting and maintaining each other, and enabling and limiting what people can both do and know (Smith, 1987). What must also be recognised is the powerful influence exerted by peoples' actual embodied locations (their material context) within social structures and the routine attachment of these to highly differentiated tasks within the private and public spheres of everyday lives (Harding in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Put another way, the tasks assigned to us often by virtue of nothing more than our gender, ethnicity or socio-economic class, for instance, childcare as opposed to corporate management, exert an inevitable (and powerful) influence in terms of our ability to access particular ways of knowing and doing.

The importance of retaining (and maintaining attention to) a political focus within feminist research is emphasized by other defenders of standpoint research/theory. Not only does such work imply a political stance, it also poses particular political questions for researchers. It necessitates that they/we explore whose questions we ask, what lives and interests these reflect, and whose particular accounts of experience we take seriously (Sprague, 2005, p. 80). When dealing with the everyday material realities of peoples' lives, such questions cannot be avoided. To do so would, at best, constitute an implicit support to the status quo, with a worst case scenario of strengthening, rather than challenging, oppressive power relations. Feminist standpoint advocates therefore freely acknowledge the politically engaged nature of standpoint methods (e.g. Harding 2004; Crasnow 2006), contrasting this to the dispassionate, abstracted, distanced or value-free character of more conventional research methodology. Such a feature is, however, not something to be seen as detracting in any way from the quality of the knowledge produced and is instead promoted as a point of strength. As Sandra Harding argues, standpoint methods "recognize that some kinds of passions, interests, values and politics advance the growth of knowledge and that other kinds block or limit it. Politics can be productive of the growth of knowledge as well as an obstacle to it, as it often is" (in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004. p.73).

I continued to explore the women's accounts, now using a more intently purposeful strategy of careful reading of theoretical texts alongside participant's stories in order to examine how the latter 'fit with' or informed the former. Finding a theoretical position that fitted seamlessly or a framework into which I could 'slot' their stories had ceased to be the objective. The aim now was to locate moments of coincidence and divergence in the relationships between their accounts and sociological and feminist theory. I was looking for those instances where theory was affirmed by their experience, but also looking to find those places where their accounts pointed to glaring gaps and omissions in theoretical framings. As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, this strategy was not without its complications as I found myself recycling some sections of participant accounts to illustrate or demonstrate different theoretical formulations. What was a theoretical affirmation in conversation with one particular theory became demonstration

of theoretical 'lack' in the context of another. Though initially troubled by this repetition I eventually came to see it as a virtually unavoidable consequence of bringing multiple theoretical positions into conversation or relationship with the same range of women's accounts.

As I continued with this strategy, one early result was that I found myself unable to identify any good reason that I should/could not bring this particular version of standpoint methodology together with Goffman's interactionist framing. Indeed, on reflection they seemed well suited and open to the necessary flexibility. The first provided, indeed was virtually built around, an awareness of the gendered power relations that had by this stage become a central element of the project while the second offered the capability to bring interactions between individuals more clearly into view. What remained hazy though was an adequate conceptualization of emotion, the embodied 'feelings' making up the experience of living through abuse. Also absent still was a satisfactorily explicit connection between the experiences and feelings of individuals and the social context they inhabit. By now though the question being asked was becoming clearer;

how did these women's accounts of their embodied experiences of abuse within their intimate relationships inform sociological theories of the emotions, specifically shame?

Chapter three

Goffman, shame, stigma and mortification of the self

Although niggling doubts persisted around the capacity of Goffman's dramaturgical framing to take account of the emotionality of the women's stories, my main interest at that time lay in locating an analytic framework I could use to scaffold the day-to-day embodied interactions contained within participant's accounts. Despite my misgivings around emotionality, his work seemed well suited to many aspects of this task and I began to explore more carefully his ideas around stigma, embarrassment and the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963). Within the sociological canon, Goffman is one of the few thinkers to explore the everyday social practices of emotion, particularly the self-conscious emotions of shame and embarrassment. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Stigma* (1963) and *Asylums* (1961) provide us with minutely detailed accounts of the myriad interactional strategies employed by individuals to manage shame in their lives - and the implications of these for the actor's sense of self. These publications, especially *Stigma* and *Asylums* include interpretations of human behavior that may be potentially useful in deepening our understandings of the actions of women living through abuse.

The Self

Goffman begins with a social constructionist view of the human self, presenting this as

not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented... (1959/1990, p.45).

Goffman's belief in the self's constitution within social interaction – as intersubjectively formed - is clearly evident in his insistence that the self is a product of a successful performance. At the same time he is careful to note that this self is not something

possessed by the individual but rather is something imputed to them by witnesses on the basis of their interpretation of the actions performed by that individual. He argues that the self is something that can be seen as residing in the institutionalized social systems and structures prevailing at any particular point in time and is thus best seen as constituting, rather than supporting the self (Goffman, 1959/1990).

From this starting point Goffman builds a theory of the construction and management of the self which he terms dramaturgy. Within the dramaturgical model of social life, individuals go about their lives actively managing the self presented to others in the course of day-to-day social interaction. Carrying the dramaturgical metaphor further, Goffman presents a framework of front stage and back stage areas of life within which individuals perform. This framework comes complete with audiences, team players, and a range of concepts designed to explain how social encounters are structured – and what happens when these don't 'come off' (Goffman, 1959/1990). Goffman's attention to the strenuous efforts required by people to cope with the consequences of performances 'gone wrong' and his mention of patterned social controls hint at the significance of social power relationships within his argument. This point though - the way in which everyday, self-constituting 'dramas' are so thoroughly and unavoidably enmeshed within these relationships of power – requires far more emphasis than Goffman gives them, especially if being utilized in the context of a feminist project concerned with gendered subordination. These social power relations constrain and/or enable how, when, where, and with whom, these dramas can be performed, making it vitally important to highlight the immense influence they exert in the construction (and control) of various human subjectivities.

Goffman does not therefore present a notion of human subjectivity as entirely mechanically and effortlessly achieved, building a case for a sense of self that is both contingent on recognition by others and not achieved without emotional exertion, and at times, cost. He is also clear to note that the choices individuals make in constituting their selves are not endlessly pliable, but are dependant upon various factors, both social and material (Goffman, 1959/1990). It was the explicit recognition of the embodied material

practices attached to the emotional aspects of the construction of self that most interested me in relation to this specific project. Much of his work, but particularly *Presentation of self* and *Stigma*, are primarily concerned with the *practice* or 'doing' of self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment and shame within everyday social interactions. This 'doing' is presented by Goffman within a framework of stigma management (Goffman, 1963/1990).

Stigma

Stigma, published several years after *Presentation of self*, is by and large an extended case study of the everyday practices involved in the management of shame and embarrassment. Bringing together his earlier conceptual framework concerning the construction and presentation of self with the notion of stigma, Goffman conducts a micro-level analysis of human interaction. In this instance however, he narrows his inquiry by focusing on the effects of stigma and the possession of stigmatized identities. With a painstakingly fine grained examination of instances of interaction Goffman draws attention to the connection between shame and stigma, highlighting the potential for shame to arise, indeed, the way in which it underpins virtually all social activity in one way or another. This work is aimed at detailing the myriad strategies employed by individuals to either stave off the occurrence of shame or manage its consequences (Goffman 1963/1990).

As defined by Goffman, in the first instance stigma is attached through attribution to an individual of some characteristic that is, or at least can be, seen as deeply discrediting to their social identity - their sense of self in relation to those with whom they interact. Developing this central concept, he suggests there are three distinct forms of stigma (attachment). Firstly, bodily stigma, as in that which is attached to those individuals suffering some forms of physical deformity. The second consists of character defects or blemishes - those aspects of an individual's character that could be "perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty"

(Goffman, 1963/1990, p.14). The final category is made up of those in possession of tribal stigmas conferred by virtue of race, religion or country of origin.

The second aspect of stigma is the way in which stigmatized individuals are contrasted with 'normals', or unstigmatised individuals. This process leads 'normals', as a group, into construction of stereotypes based on perceived (generally negative) characteristics held by the stigmatized group. In fact, Goffman argues,

[w]e construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his (sic) inferiority...we tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one... (1963/1990, pp.15-16).

His point here is that there is nothing inherently stigmatic about whatever the attributes are that come to be seen as stigmatized, or the characteristics attached to them. In short, stigma cannot be seen as anything other than socially/culturally constructed.

However, socially constructed or not, those attributed with stigmatized characteristics experience their stigma as real, with real consequences in their everyday lives. Thus they may come to identify with and accept, even if not entirely willingly or wholeheartedly, the 'normal' viewpoint. Socialization, according to Goffman, accounts for this process. As he explains,

...the standards [the individual] has incorporated from the wider society equip him (sic) to be intimately alive to what others see as his (sic) failing, inevitably causing him (sic), if only for moments, to agree that he (sic) does indeed fall short of what he (sic) really ought to be" (1963/1990, p.18).

It is when the individual becomes aware that they possess such an attribute, or that others could, even if only potentially, identify them as doing so, that Goffman says shame is likely to arise - indeed becomes almost unavoidable. Goffman's project then becomes one

of identifying how the individual copes with their stigmatized or spoiled identity and the sense of shame this generates.

Stigma, shame & abuse

Shame and its consequences for victims are at least noted in most discussions of abuse. Some such as those published by Gill Hague, Audrey Mullender and Rosemary Aris foreground shame, emphasizing the power of this particular emotion state to shape and influence the experiences of abused women – even long after the abusive relationship has ended (Hague, 2005; Mullender & Hague, 2005; Aris *et al*, 2003). Indeed, few accounts of domestic abuse fail to note the sense of shame and self-blame reported by most victims of abuse (Edleson & Toman, 1992; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). Even though they cannot reasonably be considered to be responsible²⁸, many women (including participants in this study) speak of feeling that the abuse was in some way 'their own fault'. Abuse is therefore framed either as a direct result of some (shameful or shaming) failure on their part, or as something they could or should have avoided, either by changing their behavior or removing themselves from the abusive situation, or a combination of these strategies²⁹.

In addition, not only do many victims consider themselves to be in some way at fault, and therefore shameful, they also believe that others would see the situation in a similar light. Most participants in the current study hid their experience (some for considerable periods of time) even from those people closest to them. That this can have powerful and enduring effects upon the lives of women who have lived through abuse is a point explored in detail by Audrey Mullender and Gill Hague (2005) in describing the way abuse survivors who have moved on to work in the field of domestic violence often chose not to disclose their survivor status because they fear the stigmatization attached.

²⁸ Unless of course one subscribes to the notion advanced by some very early psychological explanations of domestic violence in which the victim is masochistic and actively provokes and participates in her own abuse (some evidence suggests that some still do - i.e. 'she wanted it' defences in rape cases). This viewpoint has been thoroughly discredited in more recent times.

²⁹ While many women reported that this viewpoint shifted over time, generally once removed from the abuse, all experienced a sense of self-blame at least initially.

As participants in this project explained, many felt that they (and also their abuser) would be somehow diminished in the eyes of others if their status as a victim of abuse was revealed – a point illustrated in Heather’s self-questioning of what underlay her reluctance to seek support from her family.

I don't know why I stuck up for [partner]. It was just that people would have thought I was stupid in the head or something (Heather).

For most women this was related to ideas that they 'should have known better', 'should have left sooner', 'could have done better', or so on. For instance, in this brief passage Lynette offers a harsh self-assessment as she recounts the ‘stupidity’ of her decision making processes around her relationship.

I think, “how did I put up with him for so long?” I should have, you know, “why did we come here? Why did I even marry him in the first place?” But, anyway, you have to go through these life experiences and try these things...if you're stupid enough (Lynette).

The vast majority of these statements were presented as evidence of some psychological or emotional weakness or flaw on their part – some even going so far as to question their intelligence and/or mental health³⁰, as demonstrated in Ruby’s harsh self-critique.

I'd never ever talked about it. I mean I don't begrudge talking about it. But hell it's made me really, now I can ponder over things that when I look at them now I think, “God I was crazy” it just sounds like I was the most stupidest bitch on two feet. I was. For putting up with it. I was mad. I was crazy (Ruby).

³⁰ Audrey Mullender and Gill Hague (2005) discuss this point in terms of the barriers to service provision involvement constructed by the attitudes of some domestic violence professionals who tend to see abused women as vulnerable and in need of protection, or even as incompetent to speak on the issue, until such time as they are deemed to be recovered or ‘outside the experience’.

As already noted, they also felt sure this would be an assessment others would share. As Paula comments,

I didn't want her [sister] to know. Because, for some darn reason, I thought it was a reflection on me, that I chose him. And so I wasn't, so I didn't want her to think – oh you dick! What are you doing staying there? (Paula)

The resonance between these types of comments and Goffman's basic definition of stigma is unmistakable (Aris *et al*, 2003). So, if participants felt themselves to be seen as stigmatized – even if only potentially, what were the consequences of this?

As noted above, one of the most important issues to emerge was that participants tended to hide what was happening within their relationships, often with considerable effort and for long periods of time. They thus managed to effectively isolate themselves from potential sources of support. Paradoxically, while gaining protection from the shame of others knowing about the abuse, this strategy also provided optimal conditions for continued abuse. It should also be noted here though that in many cases these potential support systems were themselves complicit in this cover-up process, 'turning a blind eye' in an instance of what Goffman termed 'audience tact' (1959/1990). Some noted family, friends or medical personnel who seemed happy to ignore evidence or accept less than credible excuses.

What I don't get is how my parents didn't know about it. I mean if my daughter came home covered in the bruises that I had – the amount of doors I walked into! They didn't think twice about it. Maybe they just didn't want to know, I remember once I had like this massive bruise down one shoulder and my arm, and I went to the doctor and told him I'd been robbed outside an ATM machine. I mean how stupid is that? (April)

Within Goffman's framework these rationalizing, justifying and hiding strategies would be examples of what he termed the 'information game', whereby stigmatized individuals attempt to control/deny access to potentially discrediting information (1963/1990).

Stigma management: The information game

For many participants, this control of information was central to their experience of abuse. That some women went to considerable lengths to conceal what was happening within their relationship is most clearly illustrated by Anita's description of one specific episode of information management.

I nearly got busted when the plant had a huge shut down and I worked as a tea-lady... and it was over that period that I had three black eyes in three weeks. And the first black eye, everyone said "Oh, what happened to you Anita?", and I said "oh, look," because by then I had shifted back into my Mum's house.... And I said "oh at my Mum's –because when you walk up her balcony and up to the back door step the window comes out. And she pushed it out to see who was coming," and I explained it away.... And that hadn't quite healed up and I had another black eye, but on the other side. And a friend who knew [partner] and his family said "he hit you, eh?" and I said, "No, he didn't!" And I tried to explain it, and he said, "don't lie to me Anita, he hit you eh?" and I said "It's none of your business, and no he didn't..." (Anita)

Information management strategies only remain effective however in regard to stigma (abuse) which is not readily apparent or already known to others - discreditable stigma, as opposed to the more discredited form. This difference creates some difficulties for the stigmatized individual who finds themselves in a position of having to wonder whether their stigma is immediately evident and/or already known about or not. If the former, it is then a matter of dealing with a discredited identity, whereas in the latter case the

individual instead faces managing a discreditable identity, both of which generally entail rather different interactional strategies (Goffman 1963/1990).

In the event of stigma becoming known - resulting in the individual becoming discredited (for instance if an abusive or violent event occurred in front of others), then the information game becomes one of limiting damage or even attempting to reframe the event in less discreditable terms. Some women, such as Penny and Diane, explained the action as a 'one off' or out of character event, or attributed it to alcohol, drugs or stress.

My sister bailed me up one time and wanted to know if he was giving me the bash and I said "no, don't be dumb, no-one's going to smack me". Some mate of hers had told her about him pushing me over at [local hotel] and I just said, like, told her he'd got pissed and had some dak [cannabis] and didn't know what he was doing. Made out like it hadn't happened again and it hadn't sort of, not like that. I mean it just wasn't like him (Penny).

I remember one time, it was, dad had dropped mum round home 'cause he had a meeting or something so [husband] didn't know she was there and he was just wild when he got home, like screaming at me the minute he walked in the door that night. She didn't know he was like that but he stopped anyway and anyway later she said "what was that about? Does he hit you?" and I said "no". Made up some excuse about how work was really bad and he'd just lost it a bit and he'd never done it before (Diane).

Similar actions were reported by many participants when speaking of the earlier stages of their relationships - illustrated again by Miriam's account of the way in which she justified her abusive partner's violence.

He was a drinker. He used to take drugs. He often would do things in these states so again I could relate it back because when he was sober he very rarely did it. So I could kind of relate it back to the, you know, well that's how it is, you know, if

only he could stay sober. So I spent a lot of time supporting him, defending him (Miriam).

At the same time though, participants' experiences of discredited and discreditable identities also shifted over time. Goffman presents these as quite discrete and largely unproblematic, suggesting that one is either discredited *or* discreditable and that either of these is either desirable or not – identifiable or not. Participants in this research talked about their identities (and identification) as abused women in a rather more ambiguous way which challenges Goffman's either/or description. For instance many women noted that at times they had actively wished for some visible evidence of their stigmatized status, aware that help was far more likely to be forthcoming if their request was backed up by blood and/or bruising. Thus, for many women, possession of a discredited identity, while not in any way desirable, was in fact needed – even *necessary*, in order to legitimize both their claims of abuse and appeals for assistance. This excerpt from Miriam, utilized earlier to demonstrate the power of models that privilege visible evidence of physical abuse and hierarchical understandings of abuse, also illustrates graphically the way an inability to *prove* possession of a discredited identity – in this case the bruises evidencing violence – works to inhibit access to support.

But there was a lot of times that I actually wished he'd hit me. I actually wished that I'd had the black eyes, because he was very good when he hurt me....I didn't, I didn't get all the bruising and there was a lot of times I wished I did. It's really hard to tell someone else, people at Social Welfare it was at the time, I'm being abused....because I didn't have any real evidence of it. To tell, [caseworker], I am being abused, I am being sexually abused, do you understand? My stomach is absolutely, I'm in agony because I had to spend the last, you know, twenty-four hours holding on to urine. I'm in agony with that. My hair, my head's really sore 'cause I've been hauled around my house. I've been spat at. I feel like a big hunk of dirt. I'm being abused. But I didn't have any bruises. And it was so hard, it was so hard to tell friends. Even though they knew he was an asshole - they were quite happy about labeling him an asshole, but I wasn't being hit (Miriam).

As Miriam's words suggest, simply claiming a position as 'abused' was insufficient – a point associated with what she described as a sort of 'hierarchy' in the domestic violence world, almost an 'abuse ranking', whereby it was hugely important to be able to display physical signs of violence.

I anticipated that I hadn't been physically beaten enough - bruise-wise. Because that's kind of like the mark for a lot of people I actually think that...in hindsight, that physical abuse is, is a easier, if you're going, like if I chose to be abused - if I ever chose to be abused again, I would prefer to get hit. If I'd been hit, this might be easy to say in hindsight, I think I would have left earlier. I would have felt like I had credibility in the abuse world (Miriam).

Miriam's use of the phrase "credibility in the abuse world" suggests that the distinction between discredited and discreditable rests upon boundaries between 'worlds' in which it is credibility that is still at stake. In the 'normal' (non-abuse) world one might be discredited through an identity as an abuse victim, but to creditably take up an identity as a victim within the 'abuse world' requires specific markers of entitlement to that identity. Without these markers a woman risks being discreditable as a victim and Miriam articulates this clearly.

Others spoke though of how even clear and entirely overt displays of their unmistakably discredited identity as victims of abuse were not sufficient; claiming (and naming) of victim status, accompanied by active help seeking was seemingly also required. Many women for instance spoke of how visible injuries or the witnessing of abusive incidents were sometimes of little benefit, resulting in absolutely no intervention. Ruby, April and Laura speak here of violent assaults occurring in front of multiple witnesses – none of whom intervened.

And I went to leave the nightclub and just at the top of the stairs, he hit me, and I went down thirty or forty steps. Then when I got outside he gave me more. And

there were lots of people around. No one ever stepped in. No one did anything. And I had blood pouring in all directions, I'd put my arm through a glass door too. But yeah, nobody worried (Ruby).

We were at his cousin's place, and I went to the toilet and he just whacked me across the head and I just fell to the floor and he got his gumboot and proceeded to beat the shit out of me. And I can't describe the words as to how I felt. And in the meantime, everyone who was there knew what was going on, but no one got up and came to help (April).

He used to have a motorbike, and had the shed out the back and we were always in the shed tinkering with the motorbike and one day he turned on me outside and he had me on the ground and he had me by the hair each side and he was just belting my head on the concrete...on and on and on and I was just screaming and asking someone come and help me. And apparently they just got up and turned the telly up so they couldn't hear me. That's really ugly isn't it? Yeah, and they, the time I said that his mum couldn't wait to tell him that I'd told her to get lost or whatever, that day she stood there and watched him while he smacked me. And she, yeah, they just stood there and watched and they very seldom intervened. One or twice his dad, I know his dad did sort of say, that's no way to treat a woman, but his answer to it was to walk out of the house (Laura).

For these women accessing support or protection from this violence perhaps required that they explicitly label these events as abusive, claim their status as victims *and* actively seek intervention from bystanders. Their failure to do so may be related to the fact that in spite of their sometimes ambiguous and shifting descriptions of the specific ways in which their identities as victims of abuse played out on a day-to-day level, all participants displayed an awareness of the shame and stigma attached to these identities by others (Aris *et al*, 2003 & Mullender & Hague, 2005). As a result, most continued to hide or camouflage their positioning as they went about their everyday lives in attempts to stave off the associated shame or embarrassment – as the accounts below illustrate.

No, I didn't [tell anyone]. It never crossed my mind. I suppose I was too embarrassed, really embarrassed about it. I know that at one stage, one of the hidings that I got here, I mean...he was threatening to attack me with a hammer and I thought 'I'm going to ring the police' and then I thought, 'no, I can't ring the police, I might know somebody, they might know me and then I'm going to be really embarrassed' so no, I never ever went to the authorities or cried for help...because I was embarrassed (Angie).

I had no family support, I couldn't tell any of my Scottish friends what was going on, because of the shame of it all. And they saw me as such a lovely, bubbly, intelligent woman, a very kiwi-chick on-to-it sort of thing....I just thought – oh my God! I don't want everyone to know that this has happened, and I must stay in this relationship and make it work. And I couldn't tell any of my college friends because I am wanting to be a school teacher. You can't be a school teacher with issues like that. It would have been horrific for my profile, so to speak. So I hid it all. I think that that contributed to why, the whole time through the abuse I never told anybody. Because, well, that wouldn't happen to somebody from my upbringing, and somebody from my family, and somebody like me! So that's why I didn't tell anybody. (Anita).

I was working at Pak 'n' Save and I had a bruise on my arm, Yeah, it was massive. I've never had a bruise that big in my life. And everyone kept on asking me – are you all right? People knew, people know, they know, and I hadn't told anyone. They knew I was in an abusive relationship. It was really quite embarrassing. And I used to say I walked into something, or something happened, and I never told anyone that I got it from [partner]. I was just really embarrassed about it (Heather).

I was just so ashamed of what was happening I couldn't confide in anybody. Cause I suppose I couldn't stand the ridicule if somebody turned around and said

well what the hell are you doing letting him do that for? I mean, I actually still don't like talking about how bad it was. 'Cause you feel like, like I was saying, partly you feel it's your own fault and another part of you feels embarrassed (Laura).

This focus upon stigma and shame potentially enriches our analysis of domestic violence. Possession of an 'abuse victim' identity, whether one is positioned in this way by oneself or others entails the potential (at the very least) to be acutely stigmatizing. Such identities inevitably attach to the multiplicity of others we occupy, influencing, shaping and complicating the way these are/can be performed and experienced. One can no longer simply 'be' or accomplish 'wife', 'mother' or 'woman', becoming instead a 'battered wife', or an 'abused woman'. Of course an individual's positioning within various other social structures, for instance, socio-economic status or ethnicity, also constitutes a powerful influence, enabling and/or constraining whether a particular individual can legitimately occupy/embody any particular identity – and how they must/should do so. The complicating influence contributed by abuse adds additional complexity to the multiplicity of women's lives. As Julie's words so graphically illustrate, there are expectations attached to how, why and when we assume particular roles and what opportunities these 'should' entail. For this woman, the experience of abuse placed many of these (greatly desired) expectations beyond reach.

I was 15, very naïve. I think a typical young girl - wants the boyfriend, the white picket fence, the family, you know? The nice car – everything that goes with being a mother and a housewife I think.... But over the years it just progressed. And it was worse – black eyes, I lost my teeth – top set. It was just slowly, breaking my teeth, threatening my family, so I was not to leave. If I left he'd burn the house down with my family in it.... I was nearly drowned several times, rifle to my head several times. After my first child, my first son, which I'd planned to have thinking that that might settle him, I think a lot of it was about change and that this might make a happy family. So after our first son was born, we got a new home and we worked and we had it all. I had it all. I had my picket fence –

but it wasn't white – had a new car, a new lovely Lockwood home which I'd always wanted...and our son. But the abuse got worse (Julie).

Some women spoke too of their efforts to hide their status as abuse victims in order to avoid attachment of an equally stigmatized identity to their children. Recalling her own childhood experience, Miriam's account demonstrates a painful awareness of the stigma produced for children of abused mothers, and its consequences. However Miriam also notes in the next excerpt the way in which this memory also strengthened her resolve to maintain separation from her abuser.

My father was a very violent man..., he was, he had an alcohol problem, obviously a control problem and my mother left him when I was twelve. I remember, if I was naughty at school, it was because I came from a broken family. You know. It was stated in front of me, you know, well, you know, that's what happens when you're in a broken family. You know, so we were kind of like, down there anyway. You know, yeah, I just didn't know stuff aye. I just didn't know what I could be, what I was allowed to be - I didn't know I had a right to be (Miriam).

I know - doesn't matter what he does to me, he's not, I'm not going to have this. Cause, because you, I knew what it was like to have this violence in my home as a child. I knew how, how it was, like the cover-ups that go on, the embarrassment, the 'my father's not like other fathers'. The, I knew all of that stuff. I wasn't going to have that for these kids - they weren't going to have that (Miriam).

For women like Miriam, protecting their children in this way was thus somewhat of a catalyst for action – providing added impetus to leave their abusive partners. Others though chose to stay in their relationships but took care to avoid pregnancy and motherhood for similar reasons.

I protected my unborn babies, if I, there was one time at Teachers' College that I thought I was pregnant. I went into the doctor at, [university], you know because medical was free. And I said I want a pregnancy test. And the nurse said "Oh yes, we'll give you a urine test". And I said "No, I want a blood test. I want to know if I'm pregnant, now". Those urine tests aren't a hundred percent you know. And she said "Well, we've got an issue here". And I said "No, no. There's no issue. Here's my arm, here's a vein. Blood." Anyway, I'm moved to the doctor now and he said "Um, if you are pregnant?" "I want an abortion. There is no way I'm having a baby to the man that I'm with, who is the father of my child. There is no way." Because I just viewed that as wrong. That would have been a ball and chain definitely. Not just around my neck, but my child's neck. There was no way. He was not a suitable, he would not be a suitable father. His views on life were mental (Anita).

Intimate partner abuse as discrediting/discreditable?

So, in a range of ways, Goffman's work seemed to speak closely to many aspects of participants' experiences. They clearly understood the role of abuse victim as a stigmatized and shameful identity. This is most graphically illustrated by the strenuous and creative efforts – the information game strategies – used to hide, disguise, or somehow explain away their victim status. Also circulating within their stories was the knowledge that establishing their eligibility for support and/or assistance was strongly reliant upon both claiming and evidencing often highly context-specific versions of this identity. For instance, establishing one's victim status or identity within the context of Women's Refuge differed significantly in terms of the practices and evidence required from that needed or expected within a legal or policing context. Miriam's comments above concerning credibility within the abuse world, the need for and her 'desire' to display serious visible injuries (but only sometimes, and only in some places) speak to the contextually generated difficulties involved in stigma management for women experiencing abuse. The distinctions between discreditable and discredited stigma were also evident within the women's accounts. These however were nowhere near as stable

and clear-cut as Goffman argues, suggesting again a need for closer attention to the nuances of context – most especially in relation to the social power relations operating within both the immediate situation and the wider societal setting.

Goffman's work signals a range of potentially fruitful avenues of inquiry for abuse researchers, as the discussion above suggests. However it is a later publication, *Asylums* (1961/1968), which offers his most potentially useful work in relation to abusive relationships. This work provides an account of the micro-processes involved in the production of compliant controllable selves within the context of total institutions such as mental asylums, with much of Goffman's description closely mirroring the experiences of abuse recounted in participant's stories.

The connections between abusive intimate relationships and Goffman's notions of stigma and shame became even more apparent when brought into conjunction with the analysis put forward in *Asylums*. This publication describes interactions within total institutions such as prisons or psychiatric hospitals. Labeling these as 'total institutions' because their enclosed environment makes possible rigid and complete control over every aspect of inmates' lives, he introduces us to what he terms 'mortification of self', an induction process designed to systematically strip away an inmate's sense of self. What results is a virtual 'how to' guide to the production of shamed, and thus compliant, selves. What will be discussed below is whether the emotional and psychological barriers characteristic of abusive relationships can be likened to the enclosures of the total institutions within which Goffman constructs his analytic framing and whether this induction process is similar to the processes through which women are shamed and become compliant in abusive relationships.

Noga Avni, an Israeli sociologist and domestic violence researcher, employed Goffman's concept of the total institution in her 1991 article, *Battered women: The home as a total institution*. As far as I have been able to locate, this is the only piece of work that attempts to link this particular concept directly to abuse against women, and Avni does so in a totally literal fashion. Her research is based on the stories of a group of Israeli

women living in a shelter for battered women. It details the ways in which these women's husbands kept them physically confined within their homes, systematically employing the self mortifying processes described by Goffman to maintain control of their wives. Avni notes an unmistakable parallel between the walls of Goffman's asylums and those of these women's homes but her discussion is restricted solely to victims of physical confinement, enabling her to use Goffman's framing from *Asylums* as a close-fitting overlay to her participant's accounts. I am in total accord with Avni's work but believe it can be extended to encompass the possibility that other, less material barriers can be seen as institutions which are just as confining to victims of intimate partner abuse as the barred doors and windows she describes.

Institutionalized violence

A central question that must be addressed here though is whether the abuse recounted by participants can be understood as occurring within an institutional context. Specifically, was the day to day experience of violence they described taking place within a societal context in which violence against women is an institutionalized practice? From a sociological perspective, rather than the more literal position occupied by Goffman, to say some phenomenon has become institutionalized – is a social institution – is to identify it as a deeply embedded activity comprised of clearly patterned social practices and beliefs (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). We can speak, for instance, about the institutions of marriage, gender, or sexuality and so on.

So can violence against women be considered to be institutional – a social institution? Extensive feminist research, aimed at demonstrating the institutional nature of male violence attests to this and requires little rehearsal; violence against women, most often perpetrated by men, is a clearly documented, closely researched and extensively discussed (at least since its 'discovery' by feminists in the 1970s) aspect of virtually all human societies (Erez & Laster, 2000), including our own (Morris, Reilly, Berry, & Ransom, 2003). Feminists have also been to the forefront in developing theoretical frameworks analyzing men's violence against women as systemic, consisting of

predictably patterned abusive behaviors or actions occurring within equally predictable and patterned cycles of ongoing violence.

Local evidence supports the suggestion that violence against women within this country is a deeply embedded societal problem (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Koziol-McLain et al., 2004; Ministry of Social Development, 2002) based on distinct social practices and beliefs (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1993). In support of these assertions, a recent report produced by the Family Violence Task Force (Ministry of Social Development, 2006), in discussing strategies to eliminate violence within the home, pinpoints alteration in social beliefs around these as a central concern. These all suggest strongly that violence against women is indeed an established and enduring, indeed institutionalized activity.

Mortification of the self

As analysis proceeded, I became even more interested in the applicability of Goffman's ideas of the total institution and mortification of the self (1961/1968), introducing these to a small group of local participants in order to see if their interest mirrored my own. Early in the analysis process I had invited several local participants to become more closely involved in the project, asking if they would be willing to meet with me and discuss ideas as they developed. I had two main purposes for doing so, firstly to ensure that I was producing analysis that was meaningful to them. I was also intensely aware of the potential for the project to slide into a sort of theoretical abstraction and lose the pragmatic direction I sought. On reflection, I understand now that what I was doing was ensuring that there were other invested people keeping an eye on what I was doing and making sure I stayed 'on track', faithful both to the process and to their stories. My invitation was taken up by three women, two of whom managed to sustain their enthusiasm and geographical proximity over the lengthy birthing process of the project and with whom I now enjoy a close and trusted friendship. During the course of our ongoing discussions, it became clear that Goffman's explanation of the way in which stigmatized individuals can become separated from a solid sense of self, or at least disinterested in maintaining this self (1961/1968) was attractive to these women. They

commented that this ‘spoke’ to them, describing their experience of ‘losing themselves’ – and provided an intelligible explanatory framework of how it was that strong and intelligent women could reach a point of feeling utterly without either voice or value.

Loss of self

This ‘loss of self’ is a phenomenon noted in many accounts of domestic violence. Some, such as the ‘learned helplessness’ model trace this element of abusive relationships to the internal workings of individual psyches under the stress of severe and ongoing violence. Others employing a coercive control model, the underpinning to the majority of feminist analyses (Stark, 2007; Yllo, 2005), locate explanation of this diminution of self within larger social structures, using concepts such as patriarchy, domination and socially sanctioned male violence to present it as an understandable and logical response to gender based oppression and abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dworkin, 1993).

While most participants demonstrated an understanding of the implications of structurally based analyses, they also communicated clearly that these fell somewhat short of capturing the lived everyday or ‘micro’ practices constituting their experience. The primary point for these women was that the understandings of abuse circulating around them – most informed by some combination of the theories discussed in chapter one, did not provide an adequate explanation of the actual day-to-day practices by which they somehow came to ‘lose themselves’ and even take the blame for their victimization. For many, their taking on of blame was not an easy issue to understand, and one they had spent considerable time deliberating over. The key question for them was why and how they had come to find themselves in such a position – especially given that most considered themselves intelligent and sensible women. As illustrated by the following comments from Sandy and Laura, there was a clear ‘knowing’ by these women that anyone with a degree of intelligence simply would not find themselves in such a situation and, if they somehow did, would (and should) remove themselves very quickly. Also clearly articulated is a sense of disbelief and shame at the realization of their ‘complicity’ in the abuse.

And I mean here was me a reasonable strong person and why did you let all this happen before you did anything about it. I was not proud of it. I had really compromised myself. And I think that's something you really find quite difficult. And I think the stronger the person you are the harder it is to accept that. That you have failed in one big way.... I was so ashamed that I had let something get that bad, yes. I found that really, really difficult. And that I had married such a nutcase. I was not proud (Sandy).

I can't believe that I could live for 9 years like that. I mean, I mean I'm not a stupid person. I mean, nobody...people think of battered women as being women who want a good smacking around or women who aren't intelligent enough to do anything about it...but that wasn't the case. I didn't want to tell them [family] what was happening, because...I suppose I felt stupid for a start, and I knew what they were going to say and I didn't want them to know really how bad it was. I suppose it...not wanting to make myself look stupid for putting up with what I was putting up with because I knew it was stupid.....I would never have told anybody because, how stupid, to let him do that to me. I was just so ashamed of what was happening I couldn't confide in anybody (Laura.)

For these women, their experience became more easily comprehensible when placed within the framework advanced in *Asylums* (1961/1968). The primary value of this particular work was that its adaptation not only provided a dramatically illustrative account of the experience itself (in that the women could 'see' themselves within it), but also of the process – the everyday practices, that had managed to reduce strong, intelligent women to the position of victim.

Goffman's constructionist understanding of the self as a 'work in progress' had opened up for me consideration of the idea that individuals can become disheartened (and eventually disinterested in and apathetic towards) trying to maintain a sense of an autonomous self. If the self is an ongoing process, constructed within the confines of our

daily lives, control of this everyday experience by another individual will inevitably become part of that self – ownership of the project may well seem to be vested in another. According to Goffman, while individuals *do* exercise personal agency, this is *not* unlimited and is constrained by the circumstances of individual lives. If this constraint consists of control by one's partner – an element generally seen as characteristic of abusive relationships, the self then becomes a project over which one seemingly has little influence. Goffman characterizes this process as a form of moral loosening or fatigue, engendered by the individual learning "that the self is not a fortress, but rather a small open city", and thus less easily defensible (1961/1968, p.152).

Once the individual comes to learn, via various processes Goffman terms 'mortification of the self', "[w]hat it is to be defined by society as not having a viable self, this threatening definition - the threat that helps attach people to the self society accords them - is weakened" (1961/1968, p.151-152). A process described clearly by Sandy;

I lost total respect for myself...and I think that that was the thing that got me in the end, was my self esteem. I compromised my beliefs all the time to suit his, and in the end, you hate yourself for it. Because I mean, you are nobody. You live in limbo. You lose all of your sense of caring and it's, you're only half a person. And I think that's the thing that got me in the end (Sandy).

Sandy's account suggests that the process described by Goffman can be linked to the experiences of abuse victims. His model, whereby individuals are systematically separated from or stripped of the elements necessary to maintain a robust sense of self, is premised on physical confinement and some participants did speak of being physically confined by their abusers. Sandy, for instance, described being locked in her bedroom when her partner went out drinking. Most though talked far more extensively about non-physical confinement, describing instances of abuse and control based on coercion and/or threats, rather than imprisonment and battering. Such emotional and psychological violence is characteristic of abusive relationships and there appear few reasons preventing extension of Goffman's analysis to encompass these less tangible barriers.

This is even less the case if one considers emotion as a key underpinning of human life – the motivating force for all human activity (Gergen, 1994). Indeed from such a perspective psychological and emotional barriers cannot be seen as anything other than as powerful as material barriers in their effects. That they are often experienced as such is demonstrated by the way many victims of abusive relationships liken their experience to having been imprisoned, detailing highly punitive, yet often intangible, restraints upon their lives (Anderson et al., 2003; Jones, 2000). In many cases these depended on no more than the communication that some action/behavior/thought was forbidden - underpinned by fear of implied (or actual) punishment of transgressions.

The production of compliance

In the section to follow I will outline the micro-processes Goffman argues are utilized within total institutions to strip individuals of their sense of self and produce docile and compliant inmates. This process consists of seven clearly identifiable steps; role dispossession; identity trimming; identity dispossession; degradation and forced deference; contaminative exposure, looping; and loss of self-determination. These come into effect when the individual enters the institution and their effects remain in force throughout their confinement, ensuring pliable and easily controllable inmates (Goffman, 1961/1968). As will be demonstrated below, these steps apply to those living through abuse within their intimate relationships, with the same aims and intentions and often with the same effects upon victims.

Step 1: Role dispossession

The process of mortifying the self begins with role dispossession. Individuals are, by virtue of their admission to the institution, denied the freedom to organize the various roles played throughout the course of their normal lives - restricted to the role of 'inmate' and barred from participation in the wider social world. Common to most abusive relationships are gradual attempts on the part of the abuser to isolate his partner from the world (and potential support structures) outside the relationship (Arriaga & Oskamp,

1999; Bart & Moran, 1993; Bograd, 1988). Lynette's partner, for instance, exercised total control over her contact with the wider world. Living in a rural area with no telephone service – and before the advent of cellular phones, even the postal service was under close surveillance by her husband.

I was never allowed a letterbox. I was not allowed a letterbox. It, he didn't want any junk mail and yet where we lived, it was a very isolated place, and it was, nobody came with junk mail anyway. There was a post box [in town] so of course he got all the correspondence (Lynette).

However, while some isolating tactics may entail actual physical separation, such as living in remote areas, and/or restricting access to vehicles, psychological and/or emotional manipulation is often the chosen strategy (Arias, 1999; Chang, 1996; Maiuro, 2001; O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001). In this sense, role dispossession is premised upon a marginalizing of other previously important roles or identities. The role of wife/partner is presented as of paramount importance - all other roles are at best secondary and therefore dispensable should this be required or demanded by the abuser. As Heather recounts,

He hated my Mum and Dad because of the times they stuck up for me. He used to say – Heather, you should choose me over your parents. I don't want you seeing your parents ever again (Heather).

Her words present a copybook account of this aspect of abusive relationships, in which victims are told that their primary loyalty must (and should) reside in the relationship. Outside ties with family and friends are seen as threatening and demonstrating a lack of love and commitment. Paula saw this as an entirely deliberate strategy by her partner. As she explains,

You see, that was part of the process, I think, for him...was to break me away from the family, and all friends. I had no contact other than him and the kids...because I was cleaning at night and it was...I just never, never had

contact with other people basically. And that was on purpose. He did that purposefully (Paula).

For Paula this resulted in a feeling of isolation and increased dependence upon her role as wife and mother, and by extension, upon her partner. In this instance, participation in paid work, because of the form this employment took, did nothing to relieve her sense of segregation. As a night cleaner she had no opportunity to meet others. For some participants involved in employment outside the home though, their partner's isolation and control strategies took a different shape. These were aimed more towards reducing or even eliminating participants' workforce participation and were often played out via explicitly displayed and intense pressure to bear children and take up the role of full-time, at-home mother. Liz, for instance, describes the conflict her involvement in part-time work generated.

I started working part-time when [son] was six months old, doing a bit of nurse aiding and that caused a lot of fights because [husband] wanted me to have my next child when [son] was six months old. So it caused a lot of fights because he really did like, I guess the old cliché about barefoot and pregnant. He liked me at home. He liked it when he had control which meant me at home, him at work. Didn't have the money - didn't have the choices – kept me away from people... and that suited him nicely (Liz).

Others spoke of partners hiding or throwing away contraceptives, or simply forbidding their use, as Angie describes in her account of her partner's behaviour following the loss of her job.

I was made redundant and he wouldn't let me go back to work. He decided that, no, you can stay home and we can try for children. So what I was doing was sneaking off to the doctor and having the depo [contraceptive] until he started coming into the doctors with me. He'd come into the doctors and sit there while they spoke to me (Angie).

What was described by these women was the experience of having one's roles in the world circumscribed by another. By virtue of their inclusion in the abusive relationship the ability to participate in various roles, previously unquestioned aspects of their normal everyday lives (sister/daughter/friend/worker), was controlled or even denied to them. Many found themselves restricted to the role of wife/partner/mother, with participation in the wider social world severely constrained or even totally forbidden. Although not often occurring so suddenly for victims of abuse, the ways this process operates in their lives mirrors Goffman's description of processes restricting the roles of inmates.

Step 2: Identity trimming

Next in Goffman's mortification process comes 'identity trimming' and 'programming' as the inmate undergoes a series of indoctrination procedures - aimed at distancing them from their previous life and instructing them in the rules of the institution. This process is relatively brief and speedily done within the physical confines discussed by Goffman. In an abusive relationship, however, it may be an ongoing long-term project on the part of the abuser, most notably in terms of learning the rules - what is and is not permissible or expected within the confines of the relationship. This component of the process was demonstrated by participants in ways closely aligned with traditional gender roles – especially around issues like housework and such like. Theresa remembers this point clearly.

I wasn't allowed a toy on the floor when [partner] came inside for tea - nothing was allowed out of place. You know what I mean, and if I hadn't done the washing I'd hide it somewhere in the spare room till he'd gone to work the next morning and then I'd finish it (Theresa).

Or, as Anita recalls,

I had to make sure I was home, before he got home. Because, if I didn't, that would guarantee a hiding and I had to have the washing and everything done,

and a meal almost on the table. Now if he came home and the washing machine was going, or the dryer, or even the hair dryer...or because I was prettying myself up, or drying my hair, that would be disturbing for him. And I discussed it with his mother and she, you know her advice to me? 'Well, he listens to a chainsaw all day, so the last thing he wants to hear when he gets home is another machine, so Anita, get your shit squared away, and don't have a machine going when he's home'. Her other solution was 'Have a baby, so that you are at home all the time anyway, and you can do all the jobs' (Anita).

In relation to abusive relationships, this process of identity trimming provides valuable support to and intensification of the role dispossession discussed above. Emphasis upon the 'correct' practice of their role within the relationship, in conjunction with enforced distance from all other roles, demands backed by the threat of violence, more solidly entrenched their abuser's control. For these women, doing 'housewife/partner' to such stringently exacting standards was an all-consuming process, rendering attachment to previous roles or identities tenuous, even indefensible.

Step 3: Identity dispossession

The third element described by Goffman concerns the dispossession of name, property, and 'identity kit'. Via this process individuals are deprived of various items necessary to the performance of their previous identity - in short, the 'props' used to sustain their presentation of self, for instance, clothing and cosmetics, the equipment to maintain these, along with access to services such as hairdressers and clothing stores. This, according to Goffman, is important to the mortifying process as these items may have a special significance to the individual, thus exacerbating the impact of their removal. As he notes,

[t]he individual ordinarily expects to exert some control over the guise in which he appears before others...to be stripped of his usual appearance and of the

equipment and services by which he maintains it [means] suffering a personal defacement (1961/1968, pp.28-29).

This is an issue repeatedly surfacing in participant accounts, with women recounting instances either of destruction of such items or intense control by the abuser over what should be worn, along with when, how and for whom. As Laura recounts,

It was the subtle abuse...being made to wear, like absolutely plainness so that nobody could ever find you attractive. Not allowing you to wear makeup. Um, not allowing you to have your hair in a nice attractive style...I had long hair, right down to here 'cause I was never allowed to cut it. Only had it trimmed, was never allowed to cut it (Laura).

Miriam adds to this in noting what happened when she made attempts to assert control over her appearance.

I'd have a shower and I might put some lipstick on and kind of feel a bit happy, you know. He didn't like that. It, cause straight away, it would be, 'what've you got that shit on your face for? Where've you been? Who'd you meet?' (Miriam).

In essence these women's stories describe attempts on the part of their abusers to 'make over' and control aspects of the self they present to the outside world. Women in the current study spoke also of having these types of items destroyed or their use forbidden altogether. As Heather notes;

When I was with [partner], he took all of my wages, and if I did buy myself a dress or something, he told me I looked like a slut in it. And he wouldn't let me buy make up (Heather).

Control tactics such as these can operate to further inhibit women's interaction with others, particularly those still committed to an information game strategy of disguising

the abusive nature of their relationship. If intent upon maintaining an image of themselves as happily ensconced in heterosexual coupledness, further withdrawal from contact with others may serve an important protective function by lessening the risk of exposure of their stigmatized status.

Step 4: Degradation and forced deference

The next item in Goffman's framework is one hugely relevant to interpretations of domestic violence - the imposition upon the inmate of degrading postures and deference patterns. As he notes,

certain movements, postures and stances will convey lowly images of the individual...any regulation, command, or task that forces the individual to adopt these movements or postures may mortify his self (1968, p.30).

Included within this aspect of the mortifying process is the likelihood that the inmate may be required to provide humiliating verbal responses - a 'forced deference pattern'. This may consist of being placed in the position of having to beg or make humble requests for simple 'favors' - such as permission to make telephone calls – or even use the toilet. As Nancy recalls;

When I was in [small provincial city], I would ask if I could go to the toilet. I would ask 'is it all right to put the heater on?' I would ask for anything that I needed to do. I had to ask (Nancy).

Other women described the way their interactions with others were closely controlled by their partners. Angie, for instance, in recounting a conversation with a friend after leaving her abuser, was shocked to hear how this friend had seen her previously.

And she described me and she said to me, 'you know, when you were with [partner]', she said, 'you actually looked really old and I thought you didn't have

any teeth.’ And I...I was really dumbfounded by that and I said what do you mean no teeth? And she said, ‘whenever you spoke, you always had your head down and your hand over your mouth when you spoke.’ And I didn’t see that. I never saw that in myself and that’s how she saw me when we were together, cause I didn’t, I hardly ever spoke. I mean, you know, I was always [partner’s] something. I was never actually Angie. I was always [partner’s] whatever (Angie).

Instances of behaviors such as these characterize virtually all discussions of domestic abuse and the accounts provided by participants in this project were no exception (Sleutel, 1998; Taylor, Magnussen, & Amundson, 2001; Towns, 2000). For many, humiliation was a routine everyday aspect of their lives - precisely how this was manifested seemed limited only by the abuser's imagination, as illustrated by the accounts below.

He had a thing about total control. He, he used to prevent me from going to the toilet. One time he actually did it over twenty-four hours. I mean, in hindsight I just know how dangerous that could have been for me, physically and he would do things, like I’d get, I’d wake up in the morning and he wouldn’t let me go to the toilet....and he would feed me with drinks - coffee, tea, milo. He would take me for walks after he hadn’t let me go to the toilet, like for ten hours. So I’d be out going for walks down main streets - every now and then having to like go into almost squat position to hold on because I was so frightened of weeing myself in public and he would be very supportive of me not weeing myself in public. So in this whole thing he would appear very kind...very helpful but now looking back I can see it was all part of his game - part of his control game (Miriam).

I’d had bones broken. I’d ears severed, ripped off, stitched back And that time [partner] had beaten me really badly, he’d knocked me unconscious. When I came to, he made me eat my own vomit (Debra).

Miriam and Debra's words provide stark clarification of the degradation and humiliation experienced within their abusive relationships. Extreme as these instances may seem, they do serve as demonstrations of the type of total control experienced by many of the women participating in this study.

Step 5: Contaminative exposure

Next in Goffman's list is another easily identified element of most abusive relationships - contaminative exposure, whereby the "boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded and the embodiment of self profaned" (1961/1968, p.32). What is being described here is an individual's direct physical contamination at the hands of another person. In the context discussed by Goffman, contamination occurs through the imposition of such procedures as intrusive personal hygiene regimes, or intimate body searches and the like. For participants in this project though, what were most clearly identified as intensely humiliating and shame-filled examples of contaminative exposure were repeated instances of unwanted sexual contact - either coerced or as a result of direct physical force. As Lorraine describes;

I don't know if you'd call it marital rape or what, but he did have his own way sometimes when I was trying to get away from him. He just took what he thought was rightfully his, and just left me absolutely stunned that he'd even consider that. . Like I tried to fight him off to start with, and then you could actually look into his eyes and he wasn't there. His eyes were just glazed over, and so after he left I don't know for how long, I just lay on the bed after he left. And just thought what the hell's going on? This is just a whole new twist. So that was pretty scary. So, that was a real nasty part and, but that was just something I couldn't cope with. It was just absolutely disgusting and turned my stomach. I couldn't believe that he'd want to put me through something extra like that. The touchy bits, the marital rape and that because they were sort of like add-ons, if you like, to what was happening in the

relationship anyway. And that hurt. That really - to think that somebody has so little respect, to be able to turn around and do that was really scary (Lorraine).

Or as Sandy explains,

He was always at his worst when we'd been away somewhere, and had had a good time and then had come home. It was like he had to stamp his mark again. It [sex] was a real power thing...and incidentally, after he knocked me around he always had to have sex. That was the big thing. It was like he had to reclaim his stake so to speak (Sandy).

Although forced sexual contact was the most frequent and easily identifiable form of contaminative exposure present within participants' accounts, it was by no means the only instance. Anita, for instance, recalls an incident with her partner that impacted heavily on her physical well-being and self-care strategies for the remainder of the relationship.

I remember one time being in the shower and, I'm 5'11 and I was probably about a size 12...I was never much more than a 12. I had a little tummy. I had just eaten quite a lot and I was in the shower. I always showered before he got home and I'd kick myself if I didn't get out of the shower on time. Anyway, he caught me in the shower. He ripped the shower curtain back and he went 'ooh look at your tummy, is my baby in there?' And I felt like vomiting...he was touching my tummy, and going 'Is my bubba inside there?' And when he left...when I managed to get him out of the bathroom, I felt like ripping my body apart, literally. I honestly did...I just looked at my tummy and thought - you bastard of a tummy! And then I went into diet mode. I just didn't eat...I've got photos. I was a stick. I went down to a size 10. There was no way I was eating ever again. I wasn't ever to be accused of having his bubby again (Anita).

Many other women spoke of their partner's apparent sense of entitlement to their bodies, the claiming of which they experienced as especially abhorrent. This particular aspect of their abuse was seen as an even more cruelly offensive strategy demonstrating a total lack of respect for them as anything other than sexual objects. The dehumanized sexualizing of their bodies was emphasized by some women who recounted incidents in which all considerations of consensual sexual contact and/or consent were entirely absent. Liz, in talking about her feelings since ending the abusive relationship, identifies a huge sense of relief at no longer being subject to sexual use of this sort by her partner. Adrienne echoes her disgust, though for her the uninvited and unwelcome use of her body provided the catalyst to finally end the relationship.

I'm so relieved to have left him is probably the key thing - relief to know I never ever had to have that person again. Never had to be woken in the middle of the night with him having sex with me was probably one of the most overriding things (Liz).

It was really nice little sordid garbage...I had suspected that when I was asleep he was helping himself [to sex]. So I, 'cause what I would do, is he would come around to my place, like, this is intermittently, he would be staying at my place and that sort of stuff and he would come around and I would say well I'm going to bed. So I'd just go off to bed and what I did was I played the drunk one night. And he helped himself. And I didn't do anything about it. I just played asleep, passed out, whatever, and he rang me up the next day and I said to him, 'I never want to see you again' (Adrienne).

Certainly in these women's stories, sexual assault, whether actual or anticipated, can be readily interpreted as comparable, in an extremely intimate form, to the contaminative exposure described by Goffman.

Step 6: Looping

The penultimate step in Goffman's mortifying process consists of the disruption of the usual relation of the individual actor and their acts. This occurs through a form of 'looping', whereby an individual's defensive responses may be collapsed back into the initial situation and become the target for subsequent attacks. In the course of normal civil life, Goffman suggests, individuals enjoy a degree of latitude in the way they may respond to actions that cause offense - various 'face-saving' strategies such as sullenness, anger, or the lack of usual deference signs. Within a total institution however, such behaviors can become grounds for further punishment. Thus the inmate is denied an important self-protection element in that "he cannot defend himself in the usual way by establishing distance between the mortifying situation and himself" (1961/1968, p.41). This was a common feature of participants' stories. Many women detailed instances when attempts to protect themselves, either by trying to reason with the abuser or by non-responsive strategies such as 'being quiet' or 'keeping their head down' – or trying to do exactly what was demanded, were construed as demonstrating a lack of respect or the appropriate level of deference and resulted in renewed or intensified abuse. Penny offers an example of this in her description of the way her attempts to preserve the peace often resulted in precisely the opposite.

He used to have mates round for a beer and most of, I mean, I just didn't like most of them very much and he'd do things like make me run round getting drinks and stuff. And he was sometimes pretty happy then so it was okay to do that stuff to keep the peace but then he'd get pissed and it'd go all pear-shaped. Like he'd yell at me or whack me 'cause he reckoned I'd been disrespectful of him or his mates but sometimes if I talked to them I'd get a whack too 'cause he'd say I was trying to get off with them. It got so I was too scared to say or do anything. If I talked I was cheeky or flirting. If I didn't talk I was disrespectful and stuck up (Penny).

Tania echoes this unpredictability in her account of repeated attempts to 'get it right'.

It was really weird too 'cause I never knew really what I was supposed to be doing. Like, I always got it wrong. I remember one time, no, lots of times it was, like, he'd come home from work and I'd have tea ready and we'd have tea and I'd go to start the dishes and he'd say 'no, come and watch TV with me. We never sit and watch TV anymore'. So I'd think okay, 'this is what he wants' so I'd do it and everything would be nice. But then in the morning I'd get shit for being a filthy slut for not cleaning up. But then other times if I didn't get up and start clearing up straight away I'd get something thrown at me. It was like he couldn't decide what he wanted. Didn't matter if I did what he said or not (Tania).

Penny and Tania offer exemplars here of the ways in which conventional defensive strategies were totally ineffectual in shielding many participants from further abuse. Indeed, for these women, such attempted self-protection served only to intensify risk, looping back to provide justification for further punishment as their abusers demands shifted and changed.

Also recounted were instances in which accusations of mental illness, by partners and others were used to cover up or excuse violence. This strategy proved difficult to combat with some women speaking of the ways in which arguably reasonable emotional responses or sensible protective strategies were seen to support such claims. Julie encountered this during legal processes around her separation, while Sandy describes deliberate attempts by her partner to convince neighbors of her instability.

It took me two and a half years to get custody of my children! And I was so angry. I acted angry, I showed my anger, so it made me look like I was an unfit mother, 'cause I showed anger. I said "you don't even know what you fools are doing. He's been in and out of prison, he's abused me violently and you're making me...you're sending them back to him?!" They said "well, you know, you've got your order out, you'll be safe with that." I said "he doesn't give a

damn about that!” But there was nothing I could do. The lawyer had to take me out and tell me that I had to be calm and I started crying. I was yelling. I was angry. So when the lawyer took me out and explained to me that I was making it look like I was an unfit mother, because you’re angry. So I was showing anger. I said “what do you expect?” I really did you know...I was angry. So I had to go back in there and be calm as anything and agree and go along with them (Julie).

Quite often when he got really bad, I would spend the night away from the house, I always had a sleeping bag stashed in the horse covers. And I used to stay in the middle of the paddock. I couldn’t stay in a shed, like a hay-shed or wool shed, because he’d go looking for me. And one time he went with a gun. And that gave me a real fright, so from then on I never went into a building. And he never knew where I went when I was outside and he rushed off to get the neighbours because he tried to make out that I was mental and I was going to commit suicide and all that. I came back into the house and he had disappeared off, and then of course the neighbour arrived and I suppose that he would have hoped that I was gone and they would have had to look for me and of course that would have confirmed the fact that I was quite imbalanced. If I was spending nights away, because I mean what person does? (Sandy).

For these women, and others, the display of reasonable emotional responses or adoption of prudent self-protective strategies twisted back upon them, morphing instead into evidence of instability and thereby discrediting their claims of victimization.

Step 7: Self-determination

Finally, and also clearly congruent with accounts of abusive relationships, are the restrictions upon individual autonomy, self-determination and freedom of action that characterize total institutions. Goffman suggests that by the time individuals in normal civil society reach adulthood they have come to expect and take for granted relatively high levels of personal freedom and autonomy of action, along with the right to self-

determination. These rights are stripped from the individual upon entry to the total institution, to be replaced by extensive and pervasive surveillance and control of the individual's activities. This was a process readily identifiable within participants' accounts, often in an extreme fashion, with some women virtually not allowed out of their abuser's sight.

[partner] didn't like me doing anything much when he wasn't there, wanting me at home or with him. Shopping too. Food shopping. Clothes. Doctor. Everything. Always had to go after work to get stuff. Me and [friend] went to Farmers one time, for my birthday I think and he really flipped about that 'cause he reckoned she was, would get me in trouble. After that time he'd ring me up all the time and spin out if I didn't get to the phone in time 'cause he was worried about me or if the phone was busy (Janine).

For some participants this was an aspect of their experience made even more humiliating because of their belief that they had 'colluded' in the abuse. As Sandy describes,

I tried very desperately to be the best wife I could, to him. I tried to do the thing that he wanted and I turned inside out to do them. And of course the more I did it the more he wanted. It was never ending. We were never going to win on that. I don't think of myself as a victim, just as a martyr. I tried to manipulate myself. I tried to change my personality and it didn't work. You can't do that with you own personality (Sandy).

This was a point mentioned by several women, all of whom noted the sense of shame and humiliation generated by what they believed to be the part they themselves had played in creating and perpetuating their victimization.

Fluctuation and unsteadiness

Although mirroring their experience closely in so many ways, an important difference from Goffman's model did emerge from some participant's stories. Whereas within Goffman's total institutions the aim is the control of inmates in line with a generally clear set of institutional guidelines, within the relationships described by participants the process was fluctuating and unsteady. While women were thus aware that they were under a virtually constant form of surveillance and control, this was accompanied by a feeling of confusion - of not knowing the rules, because these tended to change frequently and arbitrarily. Julie tried for many years to 'get it right' with her husband before reaching a realization that this simply wasn't going to happen. As she explains,

I thought this isn't right, but I sort of just hung in there, and I think being my first relationship – you want it to work. You know, and I really tried my best. I tried all kinds of ways to please him, but there was nothing I could do to make him happy. I mean, where was the problem? I actually blamed myself. But I mean, the house was clean and the food was cooked, everything was done, so, washing was done. There was nothing he could have complained about – but there was always something wrong (Julie).

Many women also noted a sense of shame at the extent of their own complicity in maintaining their abuser's surveillance over and control of their activities - feeling foolish that they had so easily believed in their abuser's (claimed) ability to track their movements and activities. Paula, for instance, reported that she took extreme care to follow her abuser's instructions to the letter when he was working out of town, even though logically she knew he could not possibly be aware of what she was doing.

Considering the discussion so far then, Goffman's notion of the total institution appeared to offer a good fit as an explanatory framework for participants' accounts of abuse. It provided some insight into the way separation from a sense of self, or even apathy towards the utility of maintaining self, can occur under specific conditions. From this

position it is not difficult to see how this could easily render problematic any proactive response to the abuse.

So, despite a move away from Goffman's literal total institution and the obvious differences between the barriers he describes and those recounted by participants, the similarities of *effect* seemed to me to be striking. For several reasons the psychological and emotional constraints of their abusive relationships were experienced by many of these women as more devastating than actual physical incarceration. For instance, in the case of an abusive intimate relationship, the person responsible for the humiliation and punishment is a person with whom the victim has been, or still is, often strongly emotionally involved - as opposed to institutionally based strangers (Towns, 2000). Secondly, few of the punishment limits controlling and regulating the behaviour of institutional staff members exist in abusive relationships. Abuse can, and often does, continue unabated for extensive periods of time - unless or until serious injuries come to the attention of authorities. Even this is sometimes no guarantee of safety, with information game strategies often coming into play to conceal the source of the injury (Peckover, 2002; Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Bauer, 1996; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). Thirdly, domestic abuse, by definition, generally occurs in the victim's home - a space expected by most people to provide a safe environment becomes a dangerous and unpredictable place for abuse victims.

Finally, except in extreme cases, institutional incarceration is normally a finite episode in an individual's life - and the inmate can reasonably expect to exit the institution with at least minimal knowledge of how to avoid further episodes. Such encouraging expectations and/or protective guidelines were absent from the accounts of many participants. Not only did they report feeling that there was no way out of the abuse (fortunately an unfounded pessimism for these women), but the way many found themselves suddenly, and/or unexpectedly, involved in an abusive relationship had severely damaged belief in their own sense of judgment. Some now doubted their ability to detect early warning signs and, for them, the only safe strategy had been a conscious decision to avoid intimate relationships altogether.

It appeared then that a lack of solid institutional walls detracts little from the suggestion that abusive relationships can indeed be likened to the forms of total institutions discussed by Goffman. Far from weakening the institution, replacing more tangible boundaries with their psychological and emotional counterparts appeared as ultimately more effective and the impact on inmates/victims lives were even more insidious and durable. When these psychological barriers consist of a sense of shame and associated emotion states - engendered, communicated and performed within an environment of socially generated and supported stigma around abuse, the power of the abusive relationship - as a total institution, seems unmistakable.

However, in spite of this close 'fit' with participants' stories, especially in terms of framing the ways in which they described the experience of losing their sense of self, I was still troubled by what seemed to me to be a lack of any real sense of the specific and powerful emotionality involved in human interactions – their subjective experience. Equally importantly from a sociological perspective, Goffman's work seemed to offer little account of social power relations and the way these contributed to and/or influenced specific emotional experiences. Yes, Goffman's framing did speak of emotion and emotion management, but in an entirely rational and objective fashion. His work did indeed describe many of the day-to-day interactions of participants' lives, but these descriptions were largely unemotional accounts, presenting a cynically manipulative, highly individualized and decidedly normative picture, of human experience. The actual embodiment of emotions, the way they *felt*, as opposed to the way they were *displayed*, was left unexplicated.

What remained then was/is a framing capable of fine-grained description of observable conduct between individuals, with only an implied connection to wider social relationships, and little attention to embodied, emotional or 'felt' subjectivity. Goffman presents only the actual practices of interactions, with little sense of the felt/embodied experience of those interactions. He does note the impact of this upon the self, but neglects to explicitly identify the emotional mechanism(s) involved. He also fails to

adequately deal with the relational nature of the self – even though a social constructionist flavor is present in his work, the focus is very much upon the actions of isolated individuals operating in concert, rather than jointly constructing lives/selves. No attention is given to social power relations. This lack of acknowledgement of the ways in which social power relations operate to constitute emotion is common to much emotion research. It is especially notable in relation to work specifically concerned with emotions such as shame in relation to abuse. Shame and stigma are seen as arising out of the circumstances of the abusive relationship, occurring as a direct result of dyadic, rather than social interaction. Although these are issues implicitly flavoring a great deal of his argument – especially in terms of class/socioeconomic power, he leaves them un-named and unchallenged.

Neither of these, subjective experiences of emotionality or the role of social power relationship in constituting emotion were issues that could be put aside or ignored. Both were/are vitally important to this project, the first because feelings were so integral in this project to the women's experiences of living with abuse. Many of the women spoke of their relationships with varying degrees of anger. Many others also recounted the fear/terror they felt during much of their time in the abusive relationship. Some spoke of loving their abuser, others of the hate they felt.

However, prevalent within their narratives – indeed a part of each participant's story in some way, were accounts of the shame and embarrassment they experienced during their relationships. These self-conscious emotion states were attached to the actual abuse – their time as victims. They flavored their decision-making processes around leaving the relationship. And they also colored their reflecting and recounting of their post-abuse lives. In short, there were no interviews which *did not* make reference to emotion, especially these self-conscious emotions, in some way.

Unemotional emotionality

Because of this, adoption of a framework explicitly concerned with these self-conscious emotions, as Goffman's certainly was, seemed important. However, the lack of 'felt' or 'lived' emotionality in Goffman's work continued to worry at me – most especially I think because this emotionally flat flavor to his work persisted *despite* his frequent use of unmistakably emotive terminology. In his introduction to *Asylums*, for instance, Goffman speaks of inmates (of total institutions) as tending to feel “inferior, weak, blameworthy, and guilty” (1961/1968, p.18); as becoming “demoralized” (p.21); as suffering a “series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self” (p. 24); and/or “personal defacements” (p.29). He notes inmate socialization processes, whereby individuals are habituated to the requirement that they “punctuate their social interactions with staff by verbal acts of deference...to beg, importune, or humbly ask for little things” (p. 31), and discusses the way staff may “call the individual obscene names, curse him (sic), point out his (sic) negative attributes, tease him (sic), or talk about him (sic)...as if he (sic) were not present....” (p. 31).

All of the above conjures up, at least for me, a sense of intense (and unpleasant) emotion – producing an empathetic identification with the experiences described, yet in his words Goffman betrays not the slightest hint of personal connection or reaction. What results is a graphic illustration of the consequences of adopting the role of the 'objective', 'disinterested' researcher/academic. This publication is based upon research conducted by Goffman while working within a mental institution, during which time he clearly witnessed, participated in, or at the very least was told of, instances of the dehumanizing treatment he describes so vividly. Yet nowhere within *Asylums* does the reader see even the vaguest hint that such experiences touched the author in any way at all – any reflexive accounting, emotional or otherwise is absent. As a feminist academic/researcher, positioning myself as a neutral, or even an interested observer/listener in this way was/is simply impossible. So, while some hugely suggestive parallels between Goffman's work and the stories recounted by participants were evident, these ideas clearly required

development, most especially in finding a way to acknowledge and include embodied emotionality, the subjective experience of feelings.

Chapter four

Emotion, Thomas Scheff & the social bond

Emotion and abuse

Emotion talk is pervasive within the literature, feminist and otherwise, surrounding intimate partner abuse. Various emotional concepts including love, fear, hate, anger, guilt and loneliness have been used, with varying emphases, to explain why and how abuse happens (Cunningham et al., 1998; O'Neill, 1998), why women stay with men who abuse them and why many victims fail to disclose abuse (Dunn, 2005), often even long after the violence has ended (Mullender & Hague, 2005). Abuse of women is, in fact, generally presented as *demanding* an emotional response. As Kersti Yllo suggests, “compressed into one assault are our deepest human emotions, our sense of self, our power, and our hopes and fears about intimacy...” (2005, p. 19). It is hardly surprising then that Hollander argues, “of course, sadness, anger and despair are all appropriate reactions.... Indeed, not experiencing or expressing such emotions is part of the problem of violence against women...” (2005, p. 778). Emotion is not only closely associated with the experience of abuse but is also strongly implicated in working with abuse victims/survivors (Loseke, Gelles, & Cavanagh, 2005), and in researching (Campbell, 2002) and teaching in the area (Hollander, 2005).

Early feminist accounts of domestic violence, particularly through the 1970s, relied heavily upon a language of emotionality (Dunn, 2005). As a rhetorical strategy this operated to bring into public consciousness an awareness of abuse as not only pervasive, but also hugely devastating in its effects upon women and children. Much of the emphasis at this point was upon the fear associated with abuse. Del Martin, for instance, while mentioning shame and guilt, describes fear as the common denominator linking abused women who remain in abusive relationships, notion that “fear immobilizes them, ruling their actions, their decisions, their very lives” (Martin, 1976, p. 76). Lenore Walker (1979) puts forward a similar picture, presenting fear, at least in part, as accounting for

the actions of abuse victims. Like Martin, Walker also acknowledges the existence of other emotional responses experienced by victims, prioritizing love of their abuser and guilt attached to gender role socialization as of central explanatory importance.

Indeed very few accounts of abuse, whether historical or contemporary, manage to totally avoid mention of emotion, even if only to make passing comment acknowledging the emotional content of abusive relationships/experience. Many make more direct reference to issues around emotion or affect but shroud emotionality itself through the use of emotionally ambiguous yet clearly related concepts such as depression, self-blame or self-esteem. In addition a small body of research has focused explicitly upon specific emotion states within abusive relationships. Alison Towns (2000), employing a form of poststructuralist discourse analysis, explores the ways in which women use various culturally endorsed constructions of perfect-love to talk about their experiences of abuse. This work is explicitly feminist, concentrating at length upon the gendered content and context of these experiences. Suzanne Retzinger (1991), in a more orthodox psychological analysis develops a framework linking the emotions of shame and anger. She argues that when operating in tandem these emotions work to generate and sustain violent conflict. Little attention is given to gender or social power relations within Retzinger's account. Guilt and shame form the emotional center of the analysis of domestic violence offered by Eisikovits & Enosh (1997), a conventional non-feminist account of physically abusive relationships (this is outlined in more detail below), while Griffiths (2000) takes a feminist perspective in looking at the role of anger in relation to the legal defenses of women's accused of murdering abusive partners. Margareta Hyden (1999) uses a Foucauldian framework to discuss abused women's accounts of fear. While Hyden acknowledges more conventional understandings of fear as hampering women's efforts to escape abusive relationships, she also proposes that these accounts can be understood as constituting forms of resistance to violence. More recently, Aris *et al* (2003) and Mullender & Hague (2005) note the influencing and shaping power of shame on the lives of abuse survivors.

Despite this wealth of emotion talk and its pervasiveness within our commonsense understandings of abuse and victimization, shame is one emotion state that has received little focused research attention in relation to intimate partner abuse. Most frequently demonstrated in the literature is an almost common-sense acceptance of the ‘rightness’ of shame and shaming to such circumstances. In spite of vigorous feminist argument to the contrary, it is still not seen as overly odd or unusual for women to react in a shamed way to abuse.

My decision to focus upon shame, rather than related emotion states such as self-blame or guilt was a carefully considered one. In relation to blame, especially self-blame, even though the women spoke consistently in ways indicating that they were experiencing blame – through blaming themselves – it seemed to me that this was more descriptive of something they were doing, rather than feeling. In short, blame was what they were doing; shame was the feeling attached to that action. Similarly, guilt (while often considered akin to shame) is an emotion concept more indicative of having ‘done wrong’ rather than ‘being wrong’. Guilt is thus attached to the suggestion that if the wrong can be corrected then the sense of guilt can be removed, or at least soothed. The feeling of guilt can therefore be seen as a somehow temporary and/or repairable state. Shame on the other hand is generally experienced more as a knowing that one’s self is somehow flawed or damaged; that one *is* wrong as opposed to having *done* wrong. The women did speak clearly and frequently of having ‘done the wrong thing’. However, the ways in which they did so suggested to me a more solidified and enduring sense of wrongness of self that was to be somehow lived with or accommodated rather than repaired. The possibility of reparation, and presumably also of ‘forgiveness’, for their perceived actions or inactions did not figure prominently in their accounts.

Only a small amount of work so far investigates shame and its specific relationship to abuse, with the empirical work of Eisikovits & Enosh (1997) and Buchbinder & Eisikovits (2003) among the most notable examples in the past decade, in addition to that produced by Aris *et al* (2003) and Mullender & Hague (2005). The first of these, also mentioned above, is a content analysis of interviews with 20 Israeli couples exploring the

role of shame and guilt in generating and sustaining violent interaction. The authors develop a series of models tracing the connections between moral feelings and intimate violence in a dyadic context. The second, based on in-depth interviews with 20 battered Israeli wives, employs a phenomenological analysis to link women's experiences within their families of origin to the sense of shame they reported during their experiences of intimate violence. In these studies, shame is found to exert a pervasive influence in the lives of respondents, effectively trapping them within their abusive relationships.

The more recent work of Rosemary Aris, Gill Hague and Audrey Mullender (Aris, Hague, & Mullender, 2003) and (Hague & Mullender (2005), while taking a somewhat different path, also concentrate upon shame, pointing to the pervasiveness and durability of the shame and stigma attached to the identity of abuse survivor or victim. They note that this shameful identity remains, even long after the abuse has ceased, and draw attention to the way this operates to inhibit some women's participation in service provider and/or client advisory roles. Apart from these, Denzin's 1984 sociological analysis, a piece that explicitly connects abused women's experience of shame to the social norms underpinning gender relationships and Baker's more recent 2003 poststructural analysis offering similar conclusions, there appears to be little other shame/abuse research directing attention explicitly towards shame's genesis in wider social, rather than simply dyadic, interaction.

Thomas Scheff and the social bond

I realized that what I needed to locate then was theory capable of encompassing the societal context within which the abuse occurred *and* the powerful shaping influence of this context on the abuse and how it was experienced, in both a material and emotional sense. It was in searching for a way to account for social context – social power relations in operation, that the work of Thomas Scheff (1995; 1997; 2000; 2003), including his collaborative work with Suzanne Retzinger (2000), began to appeal. On first acquaintance the ideas advanced by Scheff and Retzinger looked extremely promising. Several elements of this framing fit well within this project, most notably Scheff's (1990)

conceptualization of the social bond. It seemed to me that this concept was potentially a fleshed out description of social context ‘at work’, processes which I suspected were central to a sociological understanding of emotion, especially shame in relation to women’s accounts of their embodied experiences of abuse within their intimate relationships.

Scheff (1995) contends that the notion of a ‘social bond’ is a central, virtually taken-for-granted, element of most sociological theory which has, perhaps unfortunately, received little focused discussion. The idea that human individuals are somehow bonded together in the social is, he argues, left largely unexamined, with even less attention given to what precisely constitutes these bonds. Scheff and Retzinger do not entirely remedy this lack, operating within in a clearly symbolic interactionist paradigm and focusing their gaze more specifically on bonds ‘in operation’ during actual instances of social interaction. They nonetheless provide one of the more explicit acknowledgements of the vital importance of these bonds to social organisation. Indeed, Scheff builds his entire theory upon the presupposition that

maintenance of bonds [constitutes] the most crucial human motive” (1990, p.4), contending that “[i]n all interaction, either the social bond is being built, maintained, or repaired, or is being damaged (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p 64 emphasis by author).

The social bond

So what exactly does this abstract notion of the ‘social bond’ refer to? Of what, and how, is it constituted? Or, as Scheff and Retzinger query,

[w]hat forces bind members of a society together? What forces tear them apart? What forces cause cooperation and conflict? (1991, p. 21).

And, perhaps most importantly, in the context of this project, what might the notion of a social bond mean in relation to intimate abuse? Is the bond constituted and experienced differently within abusive relationships and, if so, how? It seems to me that the best test of any theoretical proposition lies in bringing it into relationship/conversation with the everyday lives of those whose realities it purports to describe. Of course this relates to the critique of the theoretical world that underpinned the development of feminism; the recognition that much existing theoretical knowledge overlooked, even erased the experiences of women. What follows here then is an exploration of Scheff's framing, and a bringing together of the central elements of this with the words of participants; women who have lived through abuse and experienced the social bond at work within that particular context.

Connectedness

According to Scheff (1990), one of the most basic defining features of human social organisation is the need by individuals for a sense of connection to others.

...a sense of belonging, a web of secure social bonds...(1990, p.12), [suggesting that this] quest for secure bonds, the quest to be cognitively and emotionally *connected*, appears to be instinctive in all humans and other social creatures (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p.24).

This drive for connection and its sometimes destructive consequences can be clearly traced in many, if not most, accounts of abuse within intimate relationships. Researchers have written at length of the way in which victims repeatedly return to their abusive partners, indeed this has become a virtual taken for granted aspect of the process of escaping abuse. It was also something that I had found intensely troubling throughout my time working with Women's refuge and I often found myself taking the same path of explanation that so many researchers have done previously, explaining the inexplicable by suggesting it is connected to a fear of separation and loss. In Scheff's terms though, the idea that women would return is unsurprising, given their need to maintain what they

considered to be considered a central, even primary, social bond, as Julie, one of the few participants to speak explicitly about her relationship as ‘a bond’, describes.

You think: This is my man! And he’s the one for me. You love him and I think that women in general think like that: Look after your man....A lot of women stay for fear. The safety of their family. Something that you really love. So of course, like an idiot, I went back. And it was neat for a couple of weeks and then it went back to the violence. I was beaten up every night. I mean, I thought this isn’t right, but I sort of just hung in there, and I think being my first relationship – you want it to work.....You know so that’s a real bond as far as I’m concerned (Julie).

These comments from Julie also provide an early hint of what it is that constitutes social bonds. She links it clearly to the idea of emotion, specifically love. For Julie then, the bond is a connection of love; “something that you really love”. As the following account from Rachael suggests though, within an abusive context, a loving bond can be experienced in a very different and intimately damaging way. Love now becomes ‘warped’ and destructive.

Like even though someone’s beaten you up and whatever, there’s still something that’s there, some underlying, love I guess you’d call it. But it’s kind of a warped sense of love, now that you look back on it. But, yeah, like I cared about him as a person. And it was quite hard because you do grieve, I suppose, the loss of a relationship (Rachael).

Interestingly, despite their explicit comments around love, both of these women also imply attachment as much to the idea of ‘the relationship’ as to an intimate loving connection with their abuser. For instance Rachel notes grieving the loss of ‘a relationship’, while Julie’s links her determination to preserve her marriage to the fact that it was her ‘first relationship’.

Other participants also talked about the importance of being in or having a relationship, an intimate connection with another. Bronwyn, harbored few illusions about the likelihood of change in her abusive husband and wonders now why leaving took her so long: her decision-making process spanned almost twenty years, several children and numerous vicious assaults. During her marriage however, her belief in the centrality of intimate connection was of huge importance. As she notes,

it took a long time for me to [leave], I knew I was much better off without him, but I think that life is about relationship. To be in an intimate relationship with one other person (Bronwyn).

This need for relationship was a theme running through participants' stories, most placing great value upon their partnerships, despite their abusive character, noting also though the complexity this added to their decision-making processes. Some participants described their experiences in a parallel but slightly different way, talking of feeling an obligation to preserve their relationships and families.

I had this feeling that I really had to give it everything that there was. I kept feeling that I had to make sure that I had done everything possible. That could possibly make this relationship work. And I think that comes from the socialization that a woman, like this is an analysis now of it. That a woman's role is to make a happy home. And if the home isn't happy or the man is going out bonking someone else or something, that is very normal...fulfilling what you ought to be doing at home, cause if you were making it all right then he wouldn't be out doing that would he? You know, so I felt that I had to do everything to death (Adrienne).

The central theme of close personal connection and the value placed upon its preservation remained despite this difference in emphases and language, whether in the form of an intimate union with another person or an abstract institution such as 'marriage' or 'relationship'. The women's stories clearly offer support for Scheff's argument around

the importance of the social bond. However, they also signal however some potential issues with his formulation, most importantly perhaps the ways in which his seemingly neutral abstract notion can become viciously destructive within particular contexts.

Contextualizing connectedness: Public & private

One question to be asked here is what influence the shape or form of a particular social bond, for instance, that between intimate partners or close family members (as opposed to, say, those friends or colleagues), may have upon the way in which that bond operates. Does the intimate or more 'private' character of such bonds enable (or constrain) particular actions, thoughts, or feelings, both for those inside and outside the relationship? For some participants this certainly seemed to be the case. Paula, for instance, spoke of learning about the privacy attached to home as a child, noting that she "was brought up that you don't go outside, it stays home". This family secrecy was echoed by April in explaining why she'd been reluctant to seek help.

Because our family, we'd grown up with you don't talk to other people about what's happening in our house....You don't tell people what's happening in our household, big secret stuff. So that's what as a child, we never ever told anyone else what was happening (April).

For these women then, the ways in which they had come to understand the family bond operated to create an environment of secretive privacy. This distinct separation between the private or domestic sphere and the outside public world has attracted considerable feminist critique (Scott and Keates, 2004), often in relation to the ways in which the meanings attached to this demarcation serve to minimise or keep hidden away issues such as violence against women (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Wilcox, 2006). Certainly the experiences described by participants fitted with this argument, with many accounts suggesting the idea that the private domestic context of their intimate relationships exerted a powerful influence upon both the shape of their abusive experiences and their help-seeking strategies.

However this should not be read as suggesting that women's abuse occurs solely within the privacy of their own homes as this was/is most certainly not the case. The distinction is drawn only to illustrate the way in which the public or private nature of the context can alter both the form which the abuse takes and the way it is experienced. Most participants noted that the abuse was not restricted to the confines of their home. Many mentioned instances of violence occurring in more public circumstances, recalling too that the presence of witnesses offered little if any protection.

And I went to leave the nightclub and just at the top of the stairs, he hit me, and I went down thirty or forty steps. Then when I got outside he gave me more. And there were lots of people around. No-one ever stepped in. No one did anything. And I had blood pouring in all directions, I'd put my arm through a glass door too. But yeah, nobody worried (Ruby).

Anyway, we started a big argument and he was, he threw me on the bed and was yelling and screaming and went into this rage again. And [friend] and his girlfriend were standing there like, and were like – calm down [partner], calm down! And he kicked my T.V. in and he was just wrecking everything that was my stuff. Ripping my clothes up (Heather).

These excerpts imply support for feminist arguments in this area suggesting that, at least as far as onlookers are concerned, the perceived private or domestic nature of intimate heterosexual relationships may perhaps be equally as important as physical privacy. Most women did note though that the presence of others and/or being in a public space served to lessen the severity of abusive incidents, at least some of the time. Their stories indicate that their abusers' reserved the worst of their violence for within the walls of the family home. From a feminist perspective then, the perceived distinction between public and private relationships, between public and private bonds, becomes of significant concern. Such privacy, whether actual or imagined, based on location or belief, creates an environment within which abuse can flourish, thus demanding that the operation of such

distinctions be prioritized within a feminist analysis of social bonds. Scheff however does not engage in any depth with the specificities of public or private social bonds, moving instead to exploration of the ways in which these bonds connect to feelings of either social solidarity or alienation

Solidarity and alienation

To theoretically frame this aspect of his work, Scheff begins with the conceptual legacy of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, first adapting and then fleshing out the familiar concepts of alienation and social solidarity. These concepts, he argues, remain vitally important to sociological analysis, providing the tools necessary for analysis of social conflict and flawed only by their lack of specificity. As he notes

[t]he social bond and its collective counterpart, social solidarity, remains a “black box” in sociological analysis, an idea of unspecified content that is accepted without discussion or criticism (1990, p. 5).

What Scheff proposes is a closer investigation of the nature and quality of the bonds between individuals, between groups, and between individuals and groups, arguing that this will enable greater specification and understanding of social alienation and/or solidarity.

Scheff links his concept of the social bond to the work of his sociological forebears through the expedient of equating social solidarity with secure bonds and alienation with insecure bonds. This however involves a shift of focus away from the abstract omniscient perspective of some readings of historical sociology. Such a stance implies an implicitly top-down view, with social bonds the by-products, albeit vitally important functional ones, resulting from the operations of an amorphous yet extremely powerful ‘society’. From this position, little account is possible (or even considered to be needed) of the individual actions of people going about their day-to-day business. Scheff disputes this however, contending that we need to adopt a view which encompasses the micro events

of everyday social interaction *within* their macro context through close examination of conversations represented as textual discourse. This, he believes, will allow not only identification of social bonds in action, but will also enable specification of both the nature and quality of these bonds, thus highlighting the various processes by which individuals come to feel a sense of social solidarity or alienation.

Social functioning then, according to the argument developed by Scheff, is enabled by the existence of social bonds. For him, these bonds consist of four distinct but interrelated elements; attunement, communication, cooperation and emotion, with the latter pair constituting both components and ultimate outcomes of secure bonds. A 'normal' social bond, according to Scheff, involves;

‘reciprocal ratification’ of each of the parties by the other as ‘legitimate participants’ in the relationship...reciprocal ratification of each other’s participation involves both feelings and actions of legitimation. Legitimacy serves to bridge the communication and deference-emotion systems (1990, p.7).

Attunement, in this reading, refers to a state of mutual understanding and ratification between individuals and/or between groups. This suggests that levels of social solidarity, or their obverse, social alienation, can be defined in terms of the form and degree of understanding and ratification between social actors. Emotions, specifically pride and shame, perform a key embodied signal function in respect of the condition or status of the bond.

Pride and shame serve as instinctive signals, both to self and other, to communicate the state of the bond. We react automatically to affirmations of, and threats to, our bonds...pride and shame serve as intense and automatic bodily signs of the state of a system that would be otherwise difficult to observe, the state of one’s bonds to others... (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p.15).

Shame and threats to bonds are seen as inseparable, interrelated and interdependent facets of the same reality. Emotion states and levels of attunement are also interdependent, and in turn are ‘reciprocally interrelated’, to/with communication tactics between individuals and/or groups within society. Communication is central to this framing, with Scheff & Retzinger (1991) contending that direct communication demands *and* forms the basis of secure bonds. Conversely, insecure bonds are the result of damage caused through either indirect or somehow inadequate communication. Direct communication thus leads us to cooperative social interaction – based on secure social bonds. Secure bond relationships are maintained by processes of ongoing ratification, with each party demonstrating their understanding of the other’s legitimacy, in virtually every sense possible. These ratifying processes serve to legitimize

not only the other’s present thoughts, feelings, and actions but also their intentions and character – their *being*, so to speak (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p.24, author’s emphasis).

In developing this framing, Scheff and Retzinger’s (1991) intent is to explore the ways in which varying levels and/or combinations of conjunction or disjunction between these elements (attunement, communication, cooperation and emotion) offer sociological analysts the opportunity to concretely operationalise solidarity and alienation. Rather than shadowy abstractions, these are now seen as opposing points marking each end of a continuum of social harmony – one (solidarity) signaling a position of emotional and cognitive attunement between individuals or groups, the other (alienation) pointing to their absence. The structure of social order then rests upon moral-emotional *and* cognitive-behavioral foundations. Social bonds are a matrix of four elements – attunement, emotion, communication and cooperation, are equivalent in importance, operate interdependently and come together in varying degrees to constitute the ties binding individuals to each other and into the wider social world. When all are in balance, secure bonds and social solidarity result. When this balance is disrupted social bonds become insecure, damaging relationships between individuals and creating a sense of social alienation.

The social bond - a feminist reading

However, application of this framework to the world of day-to-day interaction in abusive relationships, particularly if adopting a feminist reading, poses some difficult questions. From such a perspective, the right to legitimately participate in social interaction – to legitimately *be* - clearly entails more than the capability to directly communicate one's own thoughts, feelings and actions to another. Also contained within this formulation is a parallel process of acceptance and validation of these by that other, and vice versa. This equation raises troubling questions in terms of those living in situations characterized by relations of dominance, oppression and/or subordination, requiring little imagination to detect the potential for abuse hidden within such an idealistic conceptualization of communication. One could wonder, for instance, what 'communication' and 'legitimate being' might require (of each party) in specific contexts, particularly relationships based on the exercise of power and control over another. Called into question here is what, precisely, is being ratified? Could, for instance, the ratification of one's right to *be* (alive) depend on ratification of another's right to impose control and/or inflict violence and abuse on one's body? In short, could this be seen as a ratification process legitimizing – and thus maintaining and further solidifying – the identity of each party as abuser and victim respectively? And what might these ratification processes entail? Could the mere act of remaining in the physical vicinity of one's abuser constitute a tacit ratifying of his right to abuse? Does 'direct communication' require explicit acknowledgement of the rightfulness of one's position, or could one's actions (or inactions) constitute implicit acceptance?

Mutual/reciprocal ratification

Many of the women spoke of feeling responsible for their victimization because they 'had stayed', 'should have left sooner' or 'shouldn't have allowed it'. Others took on an even more explicit responsibility. Paula, for instance, clearly believed she shared considerable blame for her abuser's actions. As she recalls,

I think I empowered him by, yeah, I just empowered him by being weak. That's how I see it now. I was too weak to get out of it (Paula).

Another, Ruby, spoke of

waking up each morning with black eyes, and split lips, or broken teeth or my face so disfigured that I couldn't see...I fell down lots of stairs, got hit by lots of fridges [but then goes on to explain that she's] never ever made [out] that it's all [partner's] fault....It takes two to make a fight (Ruby).

A number of the women's stories echo these two examples, suggesting that in some way many did indeed feel that they had ratified their abuser's right to abuse, that by 'allowing' their victimization they were somehow then complicit in their abuse. And, within Scheff's framing, this is perhaps what they *were* doing. The very act of abuse tends to attach specific identities to those involved, constituted by and ratified by each party within the moment of violence. The abuser attempts to lay claim to and ratify his rights to control and dominate through his violence, thus ratifying a bond constituted in relations of domination and subordination. She, on the other hand, unless able and willing to offer effective and immediate resistance is placed in the position of implicitly ratifying her abuser's claims. What we are seeing here are readily apprehended as processes of ratification. Equally there is clear evidence of solidarity within such relationships. In Scheff's terms, secure social bonds are being constituted and maintained. However, within an abusive context, such ratification processes constitute an unmistakable danger to these women, with the particular form of solidarity engendered by these processes operating to further disable them.

The type of solidarity suggested here, and the ratification processes described, would perhaps more conventionally be seen as socially alienating, at least by those outside the relationship concerned. Indeed, to describe bonds formed in this way as secure appears perverse at best. Yet, for some participants, the bond with their abuser *was* extremely

secure, providing a safety and surety that was important to them at the time. As Miriam recalls,

I didn't have to do much. He started to think for me - I didn't have to think much. And because I was in an, anxious all the time, it made it easier for me when he told me what to do....And so he became the person that was like responsible for my happiness - for my, for how I felt each day (Miriam).

Running parallel with an idea of bonded solidarity within their relationships though, I had noticed a theme of social alienation surfacing in participants' stories, suggesting that even if they were experiencing their bonds with their partners as secure, bonds with others were felt to be less so. Most participants noted a sense of aloneness, of feeling separate and apart from others. For some this was partly the result of deliberate isolation tactics by their abusers. Lynette, for instance, found herself physically cut off from her support networks when she moved with her husband to an isolated rural location. Without a landline and no cellular coverage, the only form of communication available to Lynette was the post, which her husband easily controlled.

The alienation of embarrassment

For others, their feelings of alienation were created as much by a sense of shamefulness and self-blame they experienced as they were by geographical segregation. This highlights the emotional content of Scheff's framing, demonstrating the contribution of emotion to both the construction and operation of social bonds. Some women experienced these factors as more powerful in tandem, describing how the neighborly social character of some rural communities combined with their sense of shamefulness to encourage secrecy. As Theresa explains,

I really didn't want them [neighbours] to know all the time. 'Cause out where we were in the country....like if there was something on, everybody went. You know

what I mean? School thing, or a party, or - everybody knew everybody but, yeah, so I mean, it was a bit of an embarrassing situation (Theresa).

Miriam's words capture these feelings of isolation and self-blame graphically as she describes the problems her relationship created within her primary support networks.

I couldn't leave at that point because I wouldn't be able to cope on my own....My mother hated him, my parents, you know, my family hated him so I became the meat in the sandwich between him and my family so of course I was isolated and alienated from them. My friends had a problem with the 'me with him' and the 'me without him', so I became alienated from them (Miriam).

As these excerpts suggest, much of what the women had to say resonated with Scheff's overall argument around social alienation. In fact, the notion of alienation described their experience painfully well and their wider social bonds seemed distinctly insecure, but what then of the individual components of his model? Was it possible to identify processes of disrupted attunement, communication, cooperation and emotion at work in their stories?

Firstly though it is worth restating the central premise of Scheff's framing. He contends that attunement, a state of agreement or harmony, or in other words, an example of a secure social bond in operation, is achieved through the reciprocal ratification of each of those involved as legitimate participants in the relationship (1990, p. 7). How does this concept of attunement, along with its definitional notions of 'reciprocal ratification' and 'legitimate participation' fit within the confines of an abusive relationship? A reciprocal relationship infers the existence of a system of roughly equivalent give and take between participants in that relationship. Can this state of equivalence be seen to exist within an abusive relationship? Ratification, in common-sense understanding, suggests that those involved in a particular relationship broadly approve, confirm or sanction each other's right to participate. In other words, participation is deemed legitimate by each of those

concerned, in general conforming to established and mutually understood rules, standards or principles. Can this be considered the case within an abusive context?

Intuitively a positive answer to any of these questions seemed to me to be doubtful. Indeed, these concepts appeared ill suited to discussion of abusive relationships, except perhaps as markers of absence and/or dysfunction, in which case what would be being described would be examples of alienation or insecure social bonds in operation. As attunement, communication and cooperation are described by Scheff as the constitutive elements of secure social bonds, and because I had difficulty seeing abusive relationships in terms of 'security' anyway, this would be an anticipated outcome. How might this picture change though if one altered the basic terms of the discussion? For instance, what would be the result if a feminist reading were applied to Scheff's framing? As signaled earlier, what might 'reciprocal ratification' look like against the backdrop of a patriarchally ordered society? How would/should 'legitimate participation' in a heterosexual intimate relationship be understood in this social context? And what might the component elements of the framing look like from this perspective? Would attunement, communication, cooperation and emotion hold the same meanings if viewed through a specifically feminist lens? Would the notions of secure and insecure bonds hold the same meanings? Indeed, would the very idea of 'secure' social bonds sound as functionally attractive as Scheff implied? I returned to the women's accounts once more to explore these questions, intent now on understanding how these central concepts played out within the women's experiences, and with what consequences.

The first point that became evident, in line with Scheff's discussion of conceptual interdependency, was that separation of the four elements, even for analytic purposes, was going to present complications. While all surfaced in one guise or another, they were presented in a shifting and unstable fashion. For instance, at times communication and cooperation could be seen as aspects of process, though even then, the meanings attached to these terms were unstable and frequently changing. In other instances these same elements were described as results of these processes but, again, with a similar degree of volatility of meanings and connotations.

Communication

For these women, communication (direct or otherwise) with/from their abusers did *not* always constitute the pathway to harmony or agreement, as Scheff suggests, but instead was described most often as a weapon of violence, with verbal abuse an experience shared by all. In one sense of course, this could be described as communication, an element of a specific ratification process – the abuser attempting to ratify his right to control - using abuse and violence to simultaneously support his rights and convince his victim of the wisdom of also ratifying these rights.

Of course women did communicate with their abusers, though this often bore only a passing resemblance to the ‘direct communication’ described by Scheff. In the main, their communication consisted of efforts to maintain peace. Most quickly learnt what was and was not acceptable within the confines of their relationships and tailored their communication strategies accordingly, as illustrated by this excerpt from Sandy, who explains that,

he had to have, I could never have a different opinion to him. He would work on me all the time to change my opinion. In the end I learnt it was better just not to have it. I would shut up (Sandy).

In a way of course this can be seen as following precisely the process Scheff outlines. By ‘keeping the peace’ and ensuring they remained within the boundaries set by their partners, these women were effectively communicating their ratification, if only by default, of their partner’s role as abuser, their own as victim. These women were thus placed in an invidious position – ‘peace-make’ and thereby ratify themselves as victims, or resist ratification and face intensified abuse as the consequence.

Women described a myriad of additional ‘communication’ strategies, both verbal and non-verbal, including emotional manipulation of various types (threats of suicide,

murder, violence against family, pets and possessions) employed by their abusers to gain compliance and cooperation.

He said 'I'm going to shoot myself'. So he went out and found a gun and two bullets and came back in and loaded them in the kitchen in front of me. And he walked out and I heard the back door slam, and the gate out the back. And I heard the shot and I thought well, he's either spread his brains hanging off all of the Macrocarpas or he's got a shot there. Is it for me? And I thought I don't care if it's for me. I really don't care. I don't care anymore (Sandy).

Over the years it just progressed. And it was worse – black eyes, I lost my teeth – top set. It was just slowly, breaking my teeth, threatening my family, so I was not to leave. If I left he'd burn the house down with my family in it...it wasn't until he threatened the kids with cyanide that I actually left (Julie).

I had a dog, an Alsatian, and whenever he got upset with me and would beat me, he would also attack the dog. Because the dog was my babe. And [partner] would easily kick the dog or smash something on him, and that was really extreme. Because an animal can't defend themselves, well neither could I, but, I would rather be abused than the animal (Anita).

For Sandy, Julie and Anita, communication in the form of emotional and psychological abuse certainly gained the cooperation sought by their abusive partners. Sandy remained in her relationship for many years. Theresa left the violence only after extreme threats against her children. Anita preferred to make herself the target rather than see a treasured pet beaten.

Paralleling the stories of Sandy, Julie and Anita, most participants recounted forms of 'communication' used by their abusers that would be better described as statements of virtual ownership, generally clearly attached to the threat of punishment for non-

compliance. Miriam recalls, for instance, the way in which her partner chose to express his jealousy, explaining how he had

put a bedspread over top of me and wrapped some cord around my throat - the bedspread over the top of me and spun me round in the room and talked about killing me and not letting me go and stuff like that (Miriam).

Others described streams of constant criticism designed to seemingly communicate their utter worthlessness; in Scheff's terms, ratifying a particular form of 'being'. In this excerpt, Adrienne describes the constant stream of attack communicated by her partner to ratify her subordinate position.

I mean, I would be run down for what I cooked for dinner, how I cooked for dinner, how I looked, what I wore, you know. I can remember going out one night and feeling, you know like, and I was sort of quite large and the only thing he could pick on me was the color of my lipstick. You know, and having people around for dinner and 'why did you set the table like that?' 'Why did you cut the carrots like that?' You know, crap like that, and it was constantly, you know, constant, constant attacking any sense of, any sense of me (Adrienne).

Viewed from a feminist perspective, these examples certainly constitute communication. Being communicated here are understandings of gender-based relationships of dominance and subordination, along with clear explication of the various rights and responsibilities attached to the positions within these; communication backed by the use of violence by these men to maintain the status quo.

For many participants non-verbal messages from their partners were extremely effective methods of communication. For instance, most women easily understood the meaning contained within the destruction of property, needing no further explanation of the risk of continuing whatever behaviour had 'caused' the incident. Many described smashing

sprees by their partners which may not have caused physical injury but which left them in no doubt as to its potential.

My Mum bought me home some really nice perfume from duty free and we were having an argument and he picked it up and smashed it and he knew I really liked that perfume. He did such nasty things to hurt my feelings. I also had a teddy bear called Singapore. I'd had it since I was a little girl, and it was on my bed, and he ripped it up into little pieces...and his eyes, they were like, like you could just see the hatred in his eyes. And that's what scared me the most. (Heather).

He would take his stuff out there and he would burn it. Like photos and anything, stuff that he had from his past. And it was actually quite weird, like there was...you know, destroying stuff about him...when we'd had these really big arguments. And he'd also go and take my stuff and burn that as well and then he, I used to have lots of little containers, in my bedroom, with lots of different things in them, and I think there was only, there was about one whole container left, like one whole thing left. He smashed all of them, in my room. I was really frightened 'cause he didn't really have a lot to lose, you know what I mean? If he was going to be an absolute nutter and do something really off the wall, he didn't really have a lot to lose (Adrienne).

Both Heather and Adrienne understood what was being communicated by these destructive episodes. Heather's partner had, throughout their relationship, made a sustained effort to separate her from family and past connections. In that particular context, his destruction of gifts and childhood mementoes required little further clarification. Adrienne's relationship was one punctuated by frequent threats of murder and suicide. Again, in this specific context, her partner's destruction of his own property held a distinct meaning for her, with his lack of attachment to personal possessions signaling to her his readiness to follow through on his threats. It does not appear, from the experiences of these women anyway, that communication need be either verbal or strictly

direct in order to accomplish the intended result. The smashing sprees described by these women were extremely effective communication strategies.

Communication with others

Quite apart from these experiences of chaotically abusive communication from/with their partners, many women also described communication with others, for instance family, friends and support agencies which was similarly variable. Sometimes this took a positive form, with the women experiencing acceptance, belief and support, thus ratifying their victimization and legitimizing their rights to assistance. Angie notes, for instance, that her abuser's mother had no hesitation in accepting her claims of violence from her son, a validation that was hugely reassuring. As she recalls,

I spoke to his mum once about it and she actually saw my body, you know, it was just covered in bruises this particular day and she said to me “you leave that mongrel bastard now” (Angie).

In other instances though this was far from the case, with most noting at least one instance of deeply damaging negative communication – sometimes of the ‘direct’ type recommended by Scheff. What can also be seen as happening here is the ratification and legitimization of their partner's rights to abuse them. Angie again provides a clear example as she describes telling her father about leaving her partner, to be met with the comment “well if you weren't such a bitch to live with he wouldn't have left you”, a clear indication of who he felt was to blame for the abuse within that particular relationship. In other examples, with similarly negative results, Anita and Julie recall efforts to gain help and support from their partners' families.

I had to make sure I was home, before he got home. Because, if I didn't, that would guarantee a hiding and I had to have the washing and everything done, and a meal almost on the table. Now if he came home and the washing machine was going, or the dryer, or even the hair dryer...or because I was prettying myself

up, or drying my hair, that would be disturbing for him. And I discussed it with his mother and she, you know her advice to me? “Well, he listens to a chainsaw all day, so the last thing he wants to hear when he gets home is another machine, so Anita, get your shit squared away, and don’t have a machine going when he’s home” (Anita).

I went to his family for help – Can anybody help me? You know, and the sun shined out of his arse and he was a real little, you know, he was the good-guy, [they said] you must be getting something from him. They blamed you for a lot. “He wasn’t like that before” That’s all that they wanted to see. That I ... he’s got a big family, he’s got step-brothers and sisters. I went to each family member and I think that there would have been about eighteen brothers and sisters. So one particular sister, whose got a Dutch husband – she’s really nice, but I stopped going there for a couple of months because she said “well, you must be doing something, because he’s not like that, my brother” So I said well that’s fine. And she wondered why I stopped going there (Julie).

Many participants also noted instances where more passive, indirect responses from others served to de-legitimize their claims of abuse or stave off requests for help and support. Despite this lack of direct communication or engagement, these women clearly understood the meaning of what was being conveyed to them. These instances frequently took the form of others accepting at face value threadbare and unlikely explanations for bruising or injuries, as April and Rachael recall;

I could make some fantastic stories up! Write them all down. What I don’t get is how my parents didn’t know about it. I mean if my daughter came home covered in the bruises that I had – the amount of doors I walked into! They didn’t think twice about it. Maybe they just didn’t want to know. I remember once I had like this massive bruise down one shoulder and my arm, and I went to the doctor and told him I’d been robbed outside an ATM machine. I mean how stupid is that? (April).

I went to the doctor's a few times but I made excuses about what my cuts and bruises and stuff were from. Even said that I'd been in a pub fight. Oh...and one time I had a jug of hot water poured on me and that was just my own clumsiness I told them. So that was, yeah...I don't think they believed me but... (Rachael).

Unsurprisingly then, communication, especially direct and honest communication, was not a strategy easily embraced by participants. As the excerpts above illustrate, the results from such open and frank communication were unpredictable at best. Many women also described instances in which such a form of communication with their partners or even some outsiders had the potential to be massively dangerous. This is clearly illustrated by Ruby as she describes the result of attempting to obtain legal protection from her partner.

I'd had a order taken out on [husband]. And when the man came to serve it, and I said to [bailiff] 'he's coming around the corner', and he said 'well, you go inside I'll do it out here'. And I went in and I was sitting at the table with [daughter] I think, and he [husband] walked in and just slammed my face into the table. I consequently ended up with broken bones in my face (Ruby).

As Ruby's experience suggests, in some cases the idea of approaching others for help was an extremely hazardous move and for many women discussion of resolutions to the violence such as separation, therapy or legal intervention with their abusers was, at best, a very frightening prospect. This was a fear backed sometimes with very clear understanding of potential consequences. Communication in instances such as these was generally crystal clear to all members of the family. As Nancy recalls,

we were always told, don't think you can ever bring the Police into this house because if you do that'll be the end of your lives. And I think that my daughter really felt that that was as extreme, that, as it, where it was going if she did bring the cops back in that she wouldn't live that day, or the rest of that day (Nancy).

Some women faced additional complications in attempting to communicate with others outside the relationship. For Laura the process of obtaining help escaping an intensely violent relationship was made even more complex because the couple lived with his family and she was employed in her partner's family business, making planning and secrecy of paramount importance. Here she describes frightened conversations with a friend who'd offered assistance.

I said 'I can't do that. They just wouldn't let me do that. I can't do that, can't you see, I can't just walk out of that house because they'll have me' and it literally was an escape. We had to time it to the second when nobody would be around so that I could get away. So we planned it to the nth degree. What time of the day he had to come and pick me up so that I could escape. And with one little bag full of undies, one change of clothes, I walked out of that house and I was scared for weeks that I would be found....the whole journey and for weeks after I was afraid for my life that I would be found (Laura).

Secrecy around their escape was something noted by most of the women, with some also requiring Police assistance because they were terrified of the consequences should their partner become aware of their plans. Communication for these women was a virtual impossibility, entailing what was to them a life-threatening potential. Theresa took the opportunity to run when her husband left for work the morning after a particularly violent incident. As she recalls,

He lost it - totally - mentally, and I just couldn't take any more. And that's when I ended up in the Refuge - got the Police and that. Because I just said he's got guns and things and I just can't take any more of that, you know. And, I mean, the kids had to be hidden, taken to school and picked up and that. He was really quite - he was going to take them to Australia and things like that..... I had to [go to Refuge] because there was, he had guns and things. Had to have the guns taken off him - he tried to shoot me and things like that (Theresa).

In summary then, communication for these women was a far more nuanced, complex and fluid concept than that described within Scheff's framing. Even in its most commonsense meaning, as a description of everyday verbal interaction, communication was problematic for most participants. Most frequently, communication within their relationships was primarily reduced to a one way process, an ongoing flow of directives, criticism and abuse from their partners. It was, for them, often impossible to engage in open and direct communication with their partners. More often they found themselves forced into secretive, evasive forms of communication in order to preserve the safety of themselves and their children. Most understood the risks involved in direct communication, with their abuser or to others about the abuse, with many requiring absolute secrecy to make their escape. Almost as difficult was communication with others outside the abusive relationship. Most experienced at least one instance of being disbelieved or having their appeals for assistance and support pushed aside or dismissed. All experienced receiving clear, if not always explicitly spoken, communication that they were somehow to blame for their victimization.

Cooperation

In a similar fashion, cooperation, in an abusive context, assumes a distinctly different character than that which Scheff implies. From the perspective he advances, striving for cooperation is an inherent aspect of each and every social bond. Cooperation, in secure healthy bonds, is therefore presented as the natural outcome of rational processes of negotiation. The actual form and/or content of that cooperation are left unspecified. The idea that achieving cooperation is an obviously desirable outcome is left unchallenged. And, most importantly, the suggestion that some forms of cooperation may far more closely resemble coercion is easily disguised. The particular form of cooperation sought by abusers clearly falls within this grouping. How then did participants see this idea of 'cooperation'? Did they feel they 'cooperated' with their abusers and vice versa? And, if so, is there an alternative reading that can be applied to their stories of cooperation?

Most tried, at least in the early stages of their relationships, to cooperate as fully as they possibly could with their abusers' demands, including sustained and complex attempts to keep the abuse hidden. The women offered a range of reasons for why they 'cooperated' in maintaining this secrecy. Some expressed embarrassment over their 'bad choices', as was the case with Heather who didn't want anyone to think she was "stupid in the head" and Sandy, who was ashamed that she had "married such a nutcase". One woman, Angie, hid the violence to protect her abuser from possible retribution, fearing that her "family probably would have just killed him if they knew". Many others, like Sandy, maintained their silence out of a fear that they would not be believed. As she explains,

people are very gullible and I would have to say that country people are very quick to believe the men. There's absolutely no doubt about it. Men are believed before women are (Sandy).

Whatever the reasons given however, all of these women would be seen, from Scheff's perspective, as 'cooperating' with their abusers, albeit reluctantly. Others 'cooperated' more explicitly with their partner's violence, with some women describing how they would provoke a violent episode in order to ease tension in the relationship.

Like there would be a lot of verbal abuse and just a general shittyness and sometimes I would, like, bait him, so that he would explode and then the tension would be gone. You know, sort of rark him up a bit and then he would lash out and then, you know, you get on with your life again (Rachael).

For some women, achieving a state of 'cooperation' with their abuser required massive compromise on their part. Miriam here describes how she rationalized her decision to give in to her partner's demands for what she considered unpleasant sexual practices in order to gain some sense of control. Unfortunately, while these strategies were expedient at the time, they tended also to add an additional layer of emotional pain for these women as they assumed further responsibility for their victimization.

I kind of turned it round. I can, I remember a point where I decided, well, okay, we'll play your game but I'm going to get enjoyment out of this too because this is not going to be one sided any more - I've had it. So I actually started to play the game with him...because it made me feel like I had a little bit of control over it (Miriam).

A similar cost attached to another common form of cooperation in which women attempted to alter aspects of themselves which their partners' had identified as problematic. As Debra and Sandy explain,

There was always a reason, and you could think - oh I'll change my behaviour, and like I knitted for the children too much, or I watch the wrong television programmes or I read too much or I cooked the wrong meal. So you know, you always tried to change your behaviour, so that that wouldn't happen (Debra).

I was a martyr in the sense that I tried very desperately to be the best wife I could, to him. I tried to do the thing that he wanted and I turn inside out to do them. And of course the more I did it the more he wanted. It was never ending. We were never going to win on that....I tried to manipulate myself. I tried to change my personality and it didn't work. You can't do that with you own personality (Sandy).

Also apparent in the women's stories was an additional form of 'cooperation', with some participants speaking of how they and their partners had worked together to disguise the abusive character of their relationship and present an image of a happy partnership in front of others. This did not appear to be an explicitly spoken agreement for most of the women. In each case, both parties were pursuing parallel aims of maintaining an illusion of relationship unity. Sandy illustrates the chameleon-like nature of the cooperative image she and her husband presented to the outside world.

He was really nice guy and he was very considerate and all those things. But it was quite different to the true person that he was. He could still be like that, when visitors came he was that person, and I actually got very jealous because other people had that person, but the minute they walked out the door the other person was there....We were always a good couple when we were out. I never ran him down or spoke badly of him, or ignored him. We always interacted in public to the extent that a lot of people who weren't in the know were very, very surprised (Sandy).

Because this research did not seek the views or stories of the men involved in these relationships, their motivations in the above circumstances must remain conjecture, as is also the case in another common instance of apparent cooperation on the part of many abusive men. Active cooperative attempts by abusers to preserve their bonds with their partners were most evident in their efforts to convince women to return to them. At this point, many of the men adopted a stance clearly designed to present what they considered to be a properly conciliatory and remorseful image. Sandy illustrates this with her description of her husband's actions following their separation.

He said that he would go to anger management and that if he ever did it again then I was to tell the Police and they would come in, which of course is all a load of rubbish. And I mean I came down here and there were flowers sent and all this nonsense (Sandy).

In short then, cooperation for these women was experienced in a far from straightforward fashion. As was the case with communication, cooperation was a constantly shifting and changing experience. Women 'cooperated' with their abusers for a variety of reasons, in a variety of ways. Some cooperation, mostly within the relationship, was largely passive, in that the women simply stayed as quiet as possible, did their best to obey instruction and avoided conflict with their partners. Sometimes though cooperation required them to take on a more active role, most notably in instances where they worked together with their abusers to convince outsiders that everything was fine. Their reasons

for cooperating ranged from their own need to somehow maintain the fiction of a happy marriage to the outside world, through to simply trying to preserve some degree of safety.

Many facets of this cooperation lessened over time for most participants, although this was not always the case. Some, for instance, maintained secrecy around their abuse long after leaving the relationship, thus cooperating in the preservation of their abuser's reputation and protecting him from criticism or censure. As Paula explains,

I've never told the kids. My point has always been why do you have to, why do you dump that on the kids. They don't necessarily need to know. I still wanted him to have a relationship with the kids, for probably the same reasons I hooked up with him in the first place – To give them a family. ... They don't need to know what an arsehole he is, and they'll never hear it from me.... I'm still reluctant to tell the kids, because this is their father. I don't have to shit on their father. Just because our relationship, his and I relationship didn't work, doesn't mean that they can't have a relationship with him. And I know that sounds dumb. But they need to know who he is (Paula).

Maintaining 'cooperation' in this way has had significant consequences for some women, particularly in respect of social bonds with others. For Paula these have involved managing the effects of secrecy on her children's relationship with her current partner. The children, now teenagers, blame him for the breakdown of their parent's marriage and consequently have been unwilling and/or unable to form anything resembling a functional relationship with their stepfather. As she explains,

My kids don't like him. They like him enough to not swear at him. But they can be disrespectful. He might ask them to wheel the rubbish bin out "Nah." Dry the dishes "nah". And to the point where he has learnt, in order for those kids to do something, he has to come through me. Kids will do it for me, but they won't do it for him. They don't flat out hate him, they're just disrespectful. And I can't

*change that. I don't know how to change that and it's too late now I think.
They're almost old enough to leave home (Paula).*

Some participants reported strain in their relationships with parents and families who did not understand why seemingly stable partnerships had ended, or who, lacking adequate knowledge of the violent nature of the relationship, disapproved of the family break up. Others attributed their lack of subsequent intimate relationships to their inability and/or unwillingness to disclose their abusive past to prospective partners, fearing they might somehow be blamed for the violence or stereotyped as victims. For these women, 'cooperation' holds a far from positive position in their lives, extending far past the termination of the abusive relationship. In some circumstances then, it is perhaps possible to call into question the very idea of a post-abuse life for some victims. Clearly for some women the abuse, while altered in form, remains a constant in their lives whatever their relationship status.

Attunement

Given that communication and cooperation appeared to hold quite specific meanings within an abusive context, what then of the third element of Scheff's framing, attunement? For participants this also assumed a quite specific form, generally described as something they strove to attain, with great difficulty and little success, unless at significant personal cost. Achieving an 'attuned bond' with their partners most often involved demonstrating their ratification of his rights to control and abuse. For most women this meant putting aside their own beliefs, thoughts, and needs or wants in order to appease their partner and maintain calm. As Sandy recalls, "*I compromised my beliefs all the time to suit his*". For some gaining attunement within their relationships required that they sever bonds with others, such as family or close friends. As Heather explains,

[partner] used to say – Heather, you should choose me over your parents, I don't want you seeing your parents ever again (Heather).

For others, maintaining their bonds meant that they needed to carefully compartmentalize the abuse within their relationships. Angie, for instance, knew that knowledge of the abuse would cause problems for her partner. At that time, because of the pressure she felt to be in a successful relationship with a suitable man, it was important to her that he be protected from the potential consequences of his violence. As she recalls,

I was scared that if I spoke to anyone about what he was doing to me, they wouldn't like him and he wouldn't be accepted.... very important...having a partner that people really liked, you know, and so it was good, 'cause it took the pressure off me finding a partner that fitted in to the family so easily..... He did, and everybody loved him. They thought that he was wonderful and nobody knew (Angie).

By protecting her partner Anita managed to achieve attunement with her family and their expectations of her, submerging her own fear in order to present an image of a seemingly secure and healthy intimate bond. This discussion around the componentry of Scheff's framing of the social bond raises interesting questions given the earlier quote from Scheff and Retzinger, which speaks of each party understanding and ratifying the other's "thoughts, feelings, and actions but also their intentions and character – their *being*, so to speak" (1991, p.24). As noted earlier, this comment suggests that secure social bonds must necessarily rest upon the mutual and ongoing ratification of each person's right to 'be'. In effect, in the context of an abusive relationship, such mutual ratification cannot be anything other than the ratification of one person's right to dominate and abuse the other. Regardless of the rightness or justice of such a position, or of the costs to the individuals concerned, so long as ratification continues, the security of that particular bond will be maintained and reinforced. While this may present a useful way in which to look at the mechanics of the social bonds between people, it offers little in terms of a feminist political agenda. It is in the unproblematised meaning attached to 'secure' within Scheff's model that much of the difficulty arises. A simple application of social bond theory to abusive relationships, using a common-sense understanding of secure, would suggest that secure bonds may well be impossible within such a context. It is doubtful

that Scheff would intend otherwise. Indeed at one point he and Suzanne Retzinger argue that

In functional families and societies, attitudes towards a particular conflict are oriented towards the good of the whole system and towards the long run.... The building of a stable, just, and effective social order requires a certain type of social control. In such a society, efficacious, ethical, and law-abiding behaviour is quickly and copiously encouraged by highly visible rewards (1991, p.168-75).

This certainly implies some form of judgment around desirable and undesirable behaviours and does not seem to support the notion that bonds between abusers and victims constitute a secure (if secure is desirable) social bond. From the position implied by this excerpt, it would seem rather that secure social bonds, at least in Scheff's understanding of 'secure', may well be impossible within the context of an abusive relationship

However, bringing a feminist lens to bear once more though opens the opportunity to read this in a somewhat different way. From this alternative perspective, the bonds created in the context of intimate abuse may well be just as secure (if not more so) as those of non-abusive relationships, especially if both parties are following Scheff's prescription of mutual ratification. However, rather than the equitable process of understanding he implies, in this context, the abuser's words and actions ratify his partner's being as that of victim, paralleled by her ratification of his being as that of abuser – as demonstrated by her fearful compliance. What are primarily being called into question here are the meanings attached to the central notion of 'secure' – particularly in respect of our understandings around intimate relationships. If interpreted as describing something as fixed, solid, or locked in place, then certainly the bonds connecting victim to abuser qualify as secure. Whether or not this security constitutes an oppressive or destructive influence in the life of either party, and whether the ongoing ratification of

individuals' beings as abuser or victim are politically or socially desirable are quite another matter.

Enter emotion: shame and the bond

The clearest demonstrations of bond insecurity in the women's stories were found in their accounts of wider social relations, rather than in their talk about their intimate relationships. As women worked to hide and/or justify the abuse occurring in their most private relationship, this created boundaries of silence and secrecy in their relationships with others, thus weakening these bonds. This process restricted their access to support, both from official agencies and family and friends, ruled out most direct or open communication, created emotional distance and ultimately destroyed the possibility of gaining cooperation from their wider social networks. In short, the secrecy infusing their lives as a result of the abuse operated to damage most other social bonds in some way. In the following excerpts Theresa, Heather and Miriam describe the ways they hid knowledge of their situation from parents and siblings. What is also interesting here, and in the following selection, is the way all draw attention emotion, to the sense of shame and embarrassment underpinning their secrecy.

I don't know [why she didn't tell parents]. I just was trying to deal to it myself I think. Because I feel, I feel like, I'd fallen pregnant and got married and maybe I was... you know, made your bed, now you lie in it sort of thing. They didn't actually say that, but I felt, my mother gave me that impression, you know (Theresa).

I don't know why I stuck up for [partner]. It was just that people would have thought I was stupid in the head or something and I should just leave him. But you don't know what it's like until you're in a relationship like that. My sister used to say – You're so stupid Heather, just leave him (Heather).

I didn't go and ask my family for help, because I, they'd already kind of like got sick of me, sort of like asking for help and then, in their perception, I just kept going back. So that was another part of it (Miriam).

Particularly insidious, complex and contradictory messages were being communicated in these accounts. These women were being informed, albeit mainly by implication, that their relationships were flawed and problematic. This is unsurprising; few would argue otherwise. Far more troubling though, these accounts also clearly attributed blame. Not only were these women being constituted as responsible/wrong for entering into abusive relationships in the first place, it was also their responsibility to somehow remedy the situation and, again by implication, a sign of failure or inadequacy if they failed to do so. For these women, such failure translated smoothly into just cause for a sense of personal shamefulness.

A similar theme emerged from the women's accounts in relation to why they didn't disclose the abuse they were suffering to friends, neighbours or, in Angie's case, the Police. Once again, for these women an underlying sense of shamefulness and their awareness of the potential for damaged or insecure social bonds should the character of their relationship have become known flavors their descriptions of attempting to maintain the secrecy surrounding their abusive experiences.

I mean, I don't actually talk that much about it. But, the occasional thing that's come out, I would have said something like, the day he locked me in the bedroom, the days he locked me in the bedroom, that kind of thing. I might say it now, because it sounds so stupid, that you can laugh and I can laugh about it. But in those days I would never have told anybody because, how stupid, to let him do that to me. I was just so ashamed of what was happening I couldn't confide in anybody. 'Cause I suppose I couldn't stand the ridicule if somebody turned around and said well what the hell are you doing letting him do that for? 'Cause it's only, you know you can see what's happening and you can see what's wrong but you just don't know how to get out of it (Laura).

Nah, didn't tell them, anyone. I did but not till after. I think it was that, something like, if they knew they might say "you should go" or something or might have it out with him and that would have got me a good slapping anyway. So when I went I just did it. Rang up Refuge and left and it would've been good to have someone to help but I sort of, it was like I hadn't said anything before so they might not believe in me. Better to keep it to myself (Tania).

I suppose I was too embarrassed, really embarrassed about it. I know that at one stage, one of the hidings that I got here, I mean...he was threatening to attack me with a hammer and I thought 'I'm going to ring the police' and then I thought, 'no, I can't ring the police, I might know somebody, they might know me and then I'm going to be really embarrassed' so no, I never ever went to the authorities or cried for help...because I was embarrassed (Angie).

A specific form of attunement can be seen demonstrated in the above excerpts, although in this instance the women are not attuned to particular individuals or relationships, but rather to a more 'generalized other'. Evidenced in these accounts is these women's recognition that their experiences of living through violence and abuse were out of tune with the values, beliefs and expectations of those in the world outside their relationship.

As the segments above suggest, the final element of Scheff's framing, emotion, was a far from ambiguous presence in the women's stories. All used emotion talk to describe and flavor their accounts, discussing various emotion states such as love, hate, anger, and, most frequently, shame, in a variety of forms. These ranged from embarrassment through to intense humiliation and covered a range of vastly differing contexts and relationships within which these emotional responses occurred. In relation to social bonds, this latter set of emotions becomes, according to Scheff, of primary importance and constitutes the central concern of his later work.

In this phase Scheff returns once more to the work of the classical sociologists to foreground his increasing interest in this particular aspect of his model (2000 & 2003). Pointing out the clearly emotional, yet largely unacknowledged, nature of much historical sociology, he begins close examination of the emotional element of the social bond – specifically shame, suggesting an explicit treatment of this particular emotion state offers much potential value to sociological understandings of social interaction. This is not an entirely new direction for Scheff whose earlier work, as outlined above, certainly could not be accused of neglecting the role of emotion, though this was seen as performing a primarily signal and/or response function.

...emotions serve to signal the state of the bond and the need to readjust behaviour in relation to the bond...shame is a message perceived to involve separation (or threat of separation) and injury to self: insult, rejection, rebuff, disapproval, unrequited love, betrayal, unresponsiveness, disrespect, and the like. Shame is intricately connected with *social separation* and threats of abandonment – responses to *alienation* from others (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p.64-65).

While retaining this point, Scheff shifts emphasis, now also affording shame a more constitutive function. Shame is now seen as impelling and shaping behavioral change by individuals in their attempts to maintain and/or repair bonds (1990). Support for this constitutive role for emotion is fleshed out by psychologist Kenneth Gergen. In *Realities and Relationships*, a call for psychology to take social constructionist insights seriously, Gergen (1994) backs up the centrality of emotion in Scheff's work in stating his belief that emotions constitute social life, rather than merely impact upon it. Gergen argues for a move away from Western notions of the individual self towards a conceptualization of selves in relationship, an idea closely congruent with Scheff's 'social bonds'. He suggests that we attempt to relocate emotion, shifting our attention away from the individual and instead focusing on relationship – the space between people. As he points out, emotional displays or performances removed from the context of ongoing relationships would be virtually incomprehensible, or not occur at all. Gergen is careful to acknowledge that emotional performances are embedded within wider social patterns and relationships with

their expression thus inevitably circumscribed and/or constrained, contingent upon specific circumstances. Sociologists Bendelow and Williams also recognize the constitutive character of emotion, commenting that much of social life, especially our capacity to choose and make decisions, would be impossible without it (1998).

Scheff shifts ground a little from these authors though with his suggestion that some particular emotion states occupy a more prominent position. For him, the dread of negative evaluation by ‘the other’ constitutes a powerful motivating force within society and, from this, Scheff argues, shame (or the fear of shame) is ubiquitous – and extremely important to virtually all social interaction. As he notes

Shame is crucial in social interaction because it ties together the individual and social aspects of human activity as part and whole. As an emotion within individuals it plays a central role in consciousness of feeling and morality. But it also functions as signal of distance between persons, allowing us to regulate how close or far we are from others (Scheff, 1997).

Indeed, based upon his conceptualization of the social bond, Scheff postulates shame as *the* primary social emotion – as the marker of any and all threats, real or imagined, actual or potential, to the social bonds between individuals and therefore encompassing a far wider range of shame related emotions than previously acknowledged. Scheff argues strongly that differentiation between various stages, intensities or variations of shame – for instance, shame and embarrassment, is, from a sociological perspective, both unnecessary and unhelpful. From Scheff’s suggested position, shame is no longer seen as a singular or stand-alone emotion state, but a concept encompassing the wider family of self-conscious emotions. Because, he argues, if shame is

generated by a threat to the bond, *no matter how slight*, then a wide range of cognates and variants follow: not only embarrassment, shyness and modesty, but also feelings of rejection or failure, and heightened self-consciousness of any kind. [Shame refers to] a large family of emotions that includes many

cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that involve reactions to rejection or feelings of failure or inadequacy (2000, pp.96-97).

An important element of Scheff's renewed interest in this aspect of his model is his reworking of the definitional terminology surrounding most understandings of shame. He argues that our definition of shame must move beyond common-sense understandings, incorporating a broader range of related emotion states and the words used to describe these, if we are to achieve a clear analysis of this powerful social emotion (2000). His insistence that we move beyond narrowly focussed vernacular understandings and terminology opens the way for more broadly framed research; investigations more capable of capturing the ways in which individuals actually understand and experience this often hidden, misnamed, and elusive set of emotion states. A key observation made by Scheff here addresses Elias' (1978, 1982 & 1983) recognition that shame *qua* shame often goes unacknowledged in modern Western society. He suggests therefore that in order to capture the experience of this emotion state it becomes vitally important to pay careful attention to the wide range of euphemistic terminology used to describe shame experiences.

The following list of verbal shame cues offered by Scheff & Retzinger (2000), while extensive, must be seen as inevitably and always partial; an unavoidable situation given cultural, historical, social differences apparent in everyday language use. For instance, in a New Zealand Maori context, *whakamaa* is often used to describe a sense of shame or shaming, while the Japanese language contains a multitude of shame related terms. This aside, it does provide a clear indication of the need to be sensitive to the breadth of everyday descriptions of the family of self-conscious emotions that one could expect to encounter in analysis of textual accounts. Thus, when identifying shame markers in text, in addition to words such as humiliation, mortification or shame itself, one would note terms such as;

alienated, rejected, dumped, deserted, rebuff, abandoned, estranged, deserted, isolated, separate, alone, disconnected, disassociated, detached, withdrawn, inhibited, distant, remote, split, divorced, polarized, confused, stunned, dazed, blank, empty, hollow, spaced, giddy, lost, vapid, hesitant, aloof, ridiculous, foolish, silly, funny, absurd, idiotic, asinine, simple-minded, stupid, curious, weird, bizarre, odd, peculiar, different, inadequate, helpless, powerless, defenseless, weak, insecure, uncertain, shy, deficient, worse off, small, failure, ineffectual, inferior, unworthy, worthless, flawed, trivial, meaningless, insufficient, unsure, dependent, exposed, incapable, vulnerable, unable, inept, unfit, impotent, oppressed, uncomfortable, embarrassed, restless, fidgety, jittery, tense, anxious, nervous, uneasy, antsy, jumpy, hyperactive, hurt, offended, upset, wounded, injured, tortured, ruined, sensitive, sore spot, buttons pushed, dejected, intimidated, defeated (Scheff & Retzinger, 2000, p.322).

Scheff backgrounds what he now terms Shame (or bond affect) in social conceptions of the self drawn from George Herbert Mead's development of a human self that is as much social as it is biological. In adopting this position he acknowledges the physiological aspects of emotion, yet maintains a sociological focus by privileging the social meanings attached to our understandings and experience of these. In order to support this line of thought, Scheff brings together the Meadian model of construction of self via role-taking with Charles Cooley's 'looking glass self'. According to Cooley, the self is an ongoing process, formed as individuals imagine themselves through the eyes of others, assume and attach judgments to this 'seeing' and absorb these judgments as part of self. In Cooley's words, "I am not who I think I am. I am not who you think I am. I am who I think you think I am". By bringing the cognitive focus of Mead and the emotional/subjective focus taken by Cooley into such close relationship, Scheff argues that we can solve the inside/outside dilemma inevitably encountered in exploration of emotion. This is a vitally important issue for Scheff who repeatedly notes that emotion *cannot* be discussed in an asocial and/or individualist way, arguing instead that we must somehow move to an understanding of emotion as constructed in relationship to/with the other(s) – another element mirroring the work of Gergen (1994). This is a recurrent

theme within Scheff's work and clearly demonstrates an awareness of the import of the social to the formation of emotion. As the excerpt below suggests however, this is a highly specific kind of 'social'.

Even today, escape from inexorable authority is still only partial. Most of us, most of the time, are enmeshed in the *status quo*, the taken-for-granted social arrangements of our society, which seem to us absolute and unchangeable.

(Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p.5).

Despite Scheff's acknowledgement of the importance of the social, it is precisely that which is most unclear in his work. The workings – the lived practices – of social power relations, within day-to-day interactions, and their often patterned repetitive character, are left largely unexplored. The version of the social presented is one suggestive of fixed rigidity and authoritarian control, experienced as dominating, inflexible and resistant to change. Similarly, his conceptualization of shame presents an emotion state that, despite its broad framing, is experientially predictable, with a steady and inevitable trajectory. This is perhaps most evident in his later work with Retzinger which introduces the notion of shame/rage spirals. In this discussion Scheff and Retzinger (1991) advance a model whereby shame, what they term (following Helen Lewis) unacknowledged shame, inevitably spirals into anger and then rage unless recognised and addressed. This process, they argue, can be seen at work in virtually all violent conflict, from widespread racial and or class based conflict between large groups, even nations, through to and including violent intimate relationships. This solidly stable framing, especially in combination with a lack of attention to questions of power, gives his work a conservative, even normative flavor³¹, thus rendering it far less helpful than it could be, particularly in terms of a feminist, change-focused agenda.

³¹ In Scheff & Retzinger (1991) the authors note that the framework they develop to explain violence is a revival of structural-functional understandings, so this is perhaps unsurprising.

Scheff and social power relations

Although touching on the point occasionally (e.g. see his 2000 readings of Elias and Howard), Scheff does little to develop any emphasis or analysis of the workings of social power relations within everyday interactions. He presents these in an unproblematised fashion, using words such as ‘just’, ‘functional’, ‘efficacious’ and ‘ethical’, and terms such as ‘law-abiding’ and ‘moral conscience’ with little explication (1991, pp. 168-75). These are left to rest upon common-sense foundations, largely ruling out queries around exactly what relations and/or interactions are ‘just’ and ‘functional’, and for whom, and in what circumstances. For instance, is it possible to see dominating and battering one’s wife as ‘efficacious’, or ‘law-abiding’ and, if so, when and under what circumstances? What would constitute an ‘ethical’ stance to such behaviour? And how would/should one’s ‘moral conscience’ react in such a situation? Would this be different if one was the abuser, or the victim, or a bystander, a fundamentalist Christian or a father’s rights lobbyist?

Perhaps because he fails to explore the potential influence of the assumptions underpinning the manner in which he employs moral language, Scheff’s framing takes on an almost apolitical flavor, unquestioningly supportive of the status quo, with *questions* of right, wrong, justice, oppression, inequity and so on largely irrelevant. His focus is trained purely upon pragmatic issues such as how people experience shame, how it occurs, how it feels, and the implications of these for social interaction. What is obscured from view is, why shame? Why in this form? Why these consequences? For instance, why do (or even should) women feel shame when victimized, as much research suggests they do? Why is this seen as an unremarkable, reasonable, even expected, emotional response to victimization? Does gender make a difference to any or all of these questions?

Gendering the bond

All of the above leads us back to the questions posed earlier - how would discussion of the social bond look if framed in explicitly feminist terms? How should we view Scheff's initial notions of 'reciprocal ratification', and would this new perspective alter our understanding of the related ideas of social solidarity and alienation? How might we now view the women's accounts of feelings of shame? Bear in mind Scheff's description of the bond as depending upon "'reciprocal ratification' of each of the parties by the other as 'legitimate participants' in the relationship...reciprocal ratification of each other's participation involves both feelings and actions of legitimation (1990, p.7). Note also that dominant contemporary understandings of heterosexual coupledness in this country, whatever the advances of feminism, are still based largely upon a series of unwritten and generally unspoken rules governing the performance of gendered identities (Gavey, 1992; Wilcox, 2006). In the main, these place men in the position of 'controller' and women in that of 'controlled'; gendered relations of dominance and submission. In such a patriarchal social context, based upon clearly gendered and unmistakably inequitable power relations, establishing legitimacy of participation within a heterosexual intimate relationship arguably makes the reciprocal ratification of positions of control and controlled necessary if its participants are to conform to everyday conventions. From this perspective, social solidarity (a notion closely linked to maintenance of the status quo) and the preservation of 'normal' social bonds would become problematic *without* this reciprocal ratification (by both partners) of unequal and potentially oppressive power relations within the relationship.

So what do these comments mean in terms of the analysis of the participants accounts offered above? The main shift is that the bonds between those involved in abusive relationships come now to be seen as entirely functional and operating smoothly in the interests of social solidarity and preservation of the patriarchal status quo, at least as long as each party holds a similar understanding of the 'proper' performance of gendered identities. In these circumstances, each would understand and ratify the feelings and actions of the other in line with dominant understandings of their rights and

responsibilities as controller and controlled; their day-to-day interactions playing out in accordance with conventional understandings of gender identities, identities based largely upon relations of dominance and submission between men and women. From this perspective the bonds formed within abusive relationships are revealed as extremely secure, rather than insecure and threatened. Solidarity becomes now to be expected, rather than surprising and in a way reminiscent of the earlier formulation of the 'Stockholm Syndrome', offers a glimmer of understanding of the seemingly inexplicable loyalty demonstrated, at least initially, by many victims (including a number of those participating in this study) towards their abusers. This sense of solidarity also goes some way towards deepening our understanding of the apparent 'collusion' of many victims of violence in their abuse. Secrecy around the abuse and protection of their abuser becomes understandable and an entirely rational expression of their primary connection to their abuser; the one with whom a secure social bond is something considered vital.

Use of the concept of the social bond in a feminist context then clearly requires some development, especially in terms of providing more explicit acknowledgement and understanding of the workings of gendered power relations and the societal context within which these occur. This becomes most apparent in terms of the final element of Scheff's bond – shame. As he notes, shame is described as resulting from some awareness of inadequacy, worthlessness, failure, defect or the like. Yet failing an account of the social power relationships and discourses structuring social interaction, there is no way to explore in any depth where this awareness stems from. Against what measure is one judged – or judges oneself, to be inadequate? Against what standard is one seen to have failed? What measure of worthiness is in use here? How does an individual come to see themselves – or be seen by others, as defective? And, perhaps most importantly, whose interests are best served by the shameful experiences of intimate victimization? Hidden from view is anything other than a superficial understanding of the potential strains and conflicts involved in the management of the broad range of social bonds connecting the often disparate strands of each individual's life. Equally as hidden are the ways in which a sense of shame can be generated by and in maintenance of these bonds.

In short, the manner in which (and why) shame *comes into being* is something Scheff presents as requiring little explanation. Shame is seen as natural, virtually inevitable in some circumstances, and certainly unproblematic and easily understandable in many instances. However, as the work of Norbert Elias (1978, 1982 & 1983) (work drawn on by Scheff) clearly demonstrates, shame is a far from natural and/or inherent human characteristic and is in fact entirely socially, culturally and historically contingent. His work traces the ways in which our understanding of shame (and how and why we should experience it) are socially and culturally constructed and dependant upon the distribution of power within social relationships, rather than *a priori* aspects of human behaviour.

While the emotion most unmistakably social in genesis, shame is also the emotion that points out most sharply the painfully isolated nature of our individuality – a point largely overlooked by Scheff. In this case shame becomes not just the premier social emotion, as Scheff argues, but also the premier personal/individual emotion. It is the feeling that makes us most aware of our individual selves and of our personal/individual responsibility for the behaviour/deportment/appearance of our individual bodies – a point emphasized in the work of Erving Goffman as discussed in chapter 3. As individuals we ostensibly have choices – albeit clearly socially mandated choices – and shame signals our failure to make the correct or appropriate choices. As individuals we choose, act, or fail to do either. It is as individuals that we are found wanting – but it is against purely social yardsticks that this failure is known and/or experienced.

In the case of abuse however, and most especially in relation to intimate abuse, these ‘yardsticks’ – and the emotional responses attached to any failure to ‘measure up’, cannot be left unquestioned. If shame (the emotional warning of bond threat) is a response to failure to adequately perform (conform to) purely socially constructed identities (wife/mother/woman/victim), and if rectifying this failure (or in Scheff’s terms, ‘readjusting behaviour’) involves acceptance of ongoing abuse (for example, returning to an abusive spouse to preserve the marital relationship), then to present shame as a vital and entirely normal response perpetuates a destructive status quo. Abuse remains an individual ‘problem’, best dealt with by individually or family focussed intervention,

with wider societal responsibility (as opposed to the provision of support and censure) avoided yet again. Virtually all necessity for challenge to the ways in which dominant discourses enable and perpetuate women's victimization is masked once more.

Moving on once more

So again, what might this mean for Scheff's notion of the social bond, or more specifically, what might this mean in terms of engaging this concept in relation with/to participants' stories within this project? Seemingly, if social bonds are to be maintained, conforming to dominant understandings of one's social identity is a virtual prerequisite. According to Scheff then, avoidance of shame (and preservation of social bonds) thus seems to depend almost entirely upon maintenance of relations of subordination or power and control, no matter how unjust, inequitable or destructive these may be, or how destructive the resulting social bonds may be. As he notes,

It is possible for the relationships in a whole society to be physically intact but based on threatened or inadequate bonds. In such a society, we would expect to find individuals willing to accept social relationships which do not meet their basic needs but are tolerated because they are better than isolation and loneliness (1990, p.14).

Such comments hold important implications in terms of his earlier work linking security of bonds to social solidarity or alienation, especially if one incorporates a feminist analysis of gendered power relations and patriarchal social organisation. Such an analysis rests on a foundational understanding of social power relations as inherently gendered, with men occupying a fundamentally more powerful position than women. This is not to suggest that *all men everywhere* possess equivalent authority, or that *all women everywhere* are equally oppressed. The holding and/or wielding of social power is of course mediated by a wide range of other socially constructed categories, such as ethnicity or socioeconomic circumstances. However, broadly speaking, men, as a social category, enjoy greater advantage. Social power relations then are played out against a

backdrop of fundamental gender inequality. From such a position, the social bonds described by Scheff begin to take on a distinctly altered shape. No longer are they simply the benign and power-neutral connectors holding individuals together in social relationships. Instead we come to see bonds that are inevitably asymmetric in their construction and operation. It could be suggested under this formula that *all* bonds between genders are therefore inherently inadequate (given their dependence upon an unattainable state of attunement and equitable communication) and under a constant state of (shame inducing) threat. While I suspect Scheff would be unwilling to push this case too far, he appears aware of the potential risk, as illustrated by the most recently cited excerpt above.

With those comments Scheff seems to be describing precisely the situation existing within patriarchally organized societies such as ours. The bonds between (heterosexual) men and women may well be physically intact – the dominance of heterosexuality attests to this. However, they may well also be threatened and inadequate – and tolerated only because of the unpalatable nature of available alternatives. Disturbing as this suggestion may be, *what might it mean to discuss these same bonds within the confines of an abusive (and presumably already inequitable) intimate relationship being played out within a broader social context of patriarchal dominance?*

Chapter five

Feminist Poststructuralism

Recapping some of the questions raised in the previous chapter casts in stark relief the need to pay explicit and careful attention to the operation of social power relations within a feminist analysis of violence against women, particularly in the context of abusive intimate relationships. The dangers of not doing so are clearly demonstrated in efforts to reconceptualise violence against women by their intimate partners as ‘mutual fighting’ or common couple violence (e.g. Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). These disguise unmistakably gendered differences in intent, degree and result of violence and gloss over the fact that the vast majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against their female partners. In short, approaches such as these operate to hide the exercise of gendered power relations between intimates. More importantly perhaps is how this fiction of power neutrality also works to occlude the support for their perpetuation which is afforded by dominant discourses of gender, sexuality, marriage and the family. Such discourses rest implicitly upon a human need to belong, to be connected with/to others - the social bond discussed at length by Thomas Scheff (2000).

Secure social bonds as indicator of social health?

In Scheff’s academic work, but also discernible in most commonsense everyday understandings, secure bonds between individuals are considered a sign of a healthy and functional society. To illustrate, consider for a moment the widespread public concern in recent years linking rising divorce rates, falling marriage rates, same sex relationships and so on with a range of negative social indicators, including crime, poverty and general moral decline. While the solidity of such links is questionable, public concern with both the form and functioning of social bonds is clearly evident (Coltrane & Adams, 2003; Catlett & Artis, 2004).

Within a local context, this conservative unease is well illustrated by an article in a recent edition of 'Real Issues' (14th Dec. 2006). This publication, newsletter of the Maxim Institute – a conservative social research organisation – notes the value of social connection, measuring this by reference to official marriage rates. The article suggests “marriage is a strong protector against poverty and homelessness and is important for social connection. Young people raised with two parents have better outcomes”. Similarly a brief internet search using search words ‘family values’ yields a wealth of comments putting forward similar arguments. Take, for instance, these words from a recent web posting by Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ (another conservative political lobbying organisation – www.familyfirst.org.nz), where the author argues that marriage is “good for a nation...[it] lowers the risk of alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse” (sourced 28.02.07).

Of course on one level such concerns, and suggested solutions, can be read as merely commonsense. These phenomena do seem to coincide. However, as has been repeatedly noted by those researching this area, an appeal for a return to traditional family forms and values is simplistic and ignores the complex realities of life in a modern industrialized society. Many feminists would add to this by noting also that traditional marriage constitutes an extremely dangerous environment for women and children (Pagelow, 1981; Pizzey, 1974; Martin, 1976), some going so far as to describe the marriage license as a license to hit (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Gelles, 1974). Thus, while we may tentatively accept that some form of intimate bonding, whether based on traditional family formations or not, is healthy, even necessary, as McCloskie argues, I would also suggest that that this acceptance must be paralleled by attention to my earlier query.

That is, are ‘secure’ social bonds, presumably such as those exemplified by marriage, healthy and functional for everyone? Does gender matter in terms of how such bonds are formed, operate and are experienced? Or, put another way, when explored against the backdrop of a patriarchally organized society, exactly what work do secure social bonds do for/to women? One could expect perhaps that answers to these questions would

depend heavily upon a clear understanding of which party held the ability/capability to exercise some form of power over/upon the other within specific relationships. One could also expect that such an analysis would be incomplete without exploration of how – through what social practices - this exercise of power manifests, with what consequences, and for whom.

Taking this line of questioning a little further to encompass issues both inside and outside of the abusive dyad, one could also ask whether it is possible to see dominating and battering one's wife/partner as an acceptable and/or 'law-abiding' practice and, if so, when and under what circumstances? Is or can such a practice be permissible in a legal sense? Is such 'permission' historically, culturally or socially contingent? These are all questions answered, in the affirmative, by an extensive range of feminist research noting historical legal and social protections of a husband's right to physically 'discipline' his wife (e.g. Lents, 1999; Kelly & Radford, 1996; Schneider, 2000) and differing cultural contexts and responses to domestic violence (e.g. Hand *et al*, 2002; Yoshioka, et al 2003; Mama, 2000). As these accounts indicate, men's violence against women has been and, for many women, still is, at the very least, permissible. The effort to eradicate violence against women remains the overriding focus for a great many feminist activists, writers and researchers, demonstrating that we may still have some way to go before these questions can receive uniformly negative answers.

Despite the pessimistic note of the previous comment, what is most important in the context of this particular discussion is the way in which all of these questions, individual and/or collective, link implicitly to the practices of relations of social power between individuals and groups. All are also interwoven with, and inseparable from, further questions concerned with identity, in particular the social practices governing the construction of individual subjectivities. Adopting a feminist stance towards these questions requires the addition of a close emphasis upon the ways in which these identities/subjectivities are not only constituted, but also how they are experienced – the every-day embodied and emotionally infused experience of social power relations at work. Such a perspective, I believe, must be explicitly grounded in several broad but

distinctly feminist theoretical and political judgments. The first entails an acceptance of gender as a central ordering principal of our society, the second an acknowledgement that this ordering is one based upon characteristically asymmetrical and inequitable power relationships between men and women, while the third is an insistence upon women's experience as a valid and legitimate source of knowledge. It is acceptance of these that enables a feminist analysis of abuse within intimate relationships as an unmistakably gendered social phenomenon.

Traditional analyses: Emerging limitations

As I signaled previously however, while the type of feminism informing most understandings of abuse answered many of the questions posed to me by this research, particularly its analysis of gendered social power relations, these were paralleled by emerging limitations. The most notable of these were the ways in which feminist analyses of violence against women spoke only to some participants stories and, even then, not all of the time. In other instances my attempts to overlay a feminist template, to hear the women's stories through conventional feminist framings of abuse, resulted in interpretations which, while thoroughly reasonable and sensible on *those* terms, sat decidedly uneasily alongside *their interpretations* of many of the experiences and understandings they recounted to me. For instance, it is a relatively simple task to reinterpret Paula's words describing her responsibility for her abuse as an example of the self-blame so often described in much feminist work as the entirely understandable result of living as a victim of abuse within a patriarchal society.

I think I empowered him by, I just empowered him by being weak. That's how I see it. I was too weak to get out of it (Paula).

From a conventional feminist perspective, Paula could not be criticized for understanding and describing her experience in such terms. A virtually inevitable result of the abuse would have been to convince her that she was indeed weak, that she did indeed empower her partner and therefore enable the abuse. Stories of the ways in which abusers managed

(or at least attempted) to convince victims that they are responsible for their own victimization are an almost a hallmark characteristic of abuse accounts. The implication of such an analysis for Paula though is that she was misguided in her belief that she was weak, that her description is somehow less credible or can be discounted or reinterpreted in the light of more accurate (feminist) knowledge. Entertaining such an analysis can possibly be useful in some circumstances, for instance, shifting beliefs such as these sits at the very heart of feminist consciousness raising strategies (Valverde, 2004). However, for Paula, what doing so *also* meant is that her account, her construction of herself and her actions when leaving her abuser, dissolve into an example of unexceptional, typical victim behaviour and belief, rather than the actions and beliefs of a determined woman pursuing a proactive strategy to protect herself and her children. For Paula, her analysis of her actions as ‘weak’ and empowering of her husband’s violence was an integral part of the process of leaving the marriage, allowing her to construct a process of positive personal change – finding strength and gaining control of her life – which enabled her to finally leave the marriage. From a conventional feminist perspective, her actions would be construed as largely the result of a victim driven to leave by fear and desperation. From Paula’s perspective though, her actions were anything but those of a victim, as illustrated by the triumphant tone of her account of leaving.

I planned it. I planned how I was going to leave. He was into [sport] and he was getting right up there in the hierarchy and I thought.... They used to go away on these training camps, three days, two days. That was all the time I needed. And I knew the next one was coming up, so I started planning how I was going to get out of there. He couldn't take the car. And I decided weeks before hand what I was going to take that was worth selling that I would sell and get more money to get away with. And when he was gone I had this little garage sale (laughs). I just stuck a sign on the side of the road, the main road, and people started showing up. And I made hundreds of bucks. And it was my runaway money....I only left him the once, and I stayed left! (Paula).

Listening to her story through the type of filter outlined above effectively undermined my ability to grasp the fine detail of *her* understanding of *her* experience, but, perhaps equally as importantly effectively categorized Paula, her actions, her responses, and her account. In short, overlaying this theoretical framing assigned her a specific identity as a ‘typical abused woman’, smoothing away any real need to come to grips with the workings of her understandings and beliefs, either in their construction or effects, gathering these together into a handy bundle to be deposited tidily in the ‘usual victim experiences’ file. In a similar way, even when participants’ accounts did resonate with conventional feminist framings, these seemed to exert an almost prescriptive influence, again dissolving the subtlety, differences and contradictions in their stories in favor of a smoothly formulaic and inevitably constraining reading. In other words, application of these ideas in their rigid entirety did produce an analysis, but one which seemed almost politically sanitized in its smoothness and which imposed a solidly stable understanding of what constitutes abuse and how it should be redressed.

Even conventional feminist analyses (as outlined in earlier sections) of the way in which power operated within abusive relationships posed some problems. While descriptive of many instances, these failed to adequately represent the experiences recounted by participants. Again, the main effect was one of smoothing and leveling their stories, massaging their accounts into a shape where patriarchal power and dominance – power over - reigned, with women’s choices and actions framed as compliant, reactive or, at best, resistant. Nonetheless I was hesitant to entirely abandon such an understanding of power. In many instances it adequately described the ways in which these women’s lives played out. What it did not seem to do however was offer a way forward – opportunities for change within a society characterized by such a monolithic form of authority as patriarchy seemed inevitably limited. One particular form of feminism however, feminist poststructuralism, seemed to offer, at least potentially, a means of resolution to this dilemma.

Feminist poststructuralism

In adopting a feminist poststructuralist perspective, I begin with three intertwined theoretical understandings which I will explore below. My interpretation of these is drawn from the writings of feminist theorists including, among others, Judith Butler (2004), Susan Hekman (2004) and Chris Weedon (1997). These women have engaged closely with the work of Michel Foucault from an explicitly feminist position, adapting and developing his theoretical insights in ways more compatible with the political agenda of feminism. While subtle differences can be discerned in the ways in which each of these women goes about this project, they all adopt a similar position in relation to several central tenets of poststructuralist thought. Firstly, that there is no universal or *a priori* human subject – a point largely in agreement with the sociological perspectives explored so far. There are instead an endlessly multiple range of historically, socially and culturally contingent, inherently unstable and fluid, but nonetheless always embodied subjectivities (Butler 2004). Secondly, that power is a productive, diffuse, and always relational phenomenon (Hekman, 2004). And thirdly, that discourse(s), through language, structure the worlds within which we live (Weedon, 1997). From a general poststructuralist position, none of these tenets presents as particularly problematic. However, in what follows, these theoretical positions must enter into conversation with those specified previously relating to asymmetrically constituted gendered power relations and the validity of women's experience within knowledge production processes. While not always an easy or comfortable conversation, this is nonetheless crucial to the maintenance of an explicitly feminist analysis that has as its goal a politically useful account of women's lived experience.

Subjectivity

The notion of the self, the human subject, as socially constructed constitutes a central tenet of feminist thought. As Simone de Beauvoir so famously observed, women are made, not born. This, then, is one of the less problematic aspects of Foucault's work for

feminists – at least at this basic level. What so many have pondered and debated though is precisely *how* this self is constructed, a point that many feminists consider inadequately developed by Foucault (Taylor & Vintges, 2004). These debates have been fueled largely by Foucault's ambivalent stance towards the self and the body within his work, or more precisely, its relationship to power (Butler, 2004). Foucault offers an apparently vacillating account of this relationship. On the one hand, in his earlier work, he suggests that power relations operate or are exercised upon the body. For instance, in *Discipline and Punish*, he writes

...it is always the body which is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and docility, their distribution and their submission... [and that] power relations have an immediate hold upon it [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs (1995, p.25).

From this position, it seems that power is exercised upon a passive or docile body and the self is somehow brought into being by processes of power. The first point creates a problem for some feminists intent on maintaining a solid conceptualization of agency (McNay, 1992), suggesting a helpless subject unable to resist the effects of power. While applauding his recognition of subjective fluidity and contingency, some argued that Foucault took this too far, portraying an *overly* discourse determined subject. As Amy Allen notes, these critics charge that

the account of the self in Foucault's genealogical works is *too* contextualized; social relations imbued with power that render bodies docile threaten to obliterate the agency and autonomy of the self (2004, p. 235).

The dangers inherent to adoption of such a socially determined self have not been treated lightly by those working within a feminist poststructuralist framework. Those choosing this path have taken care to maintain purchase upon a clear notion of women as active autonomous agents, *but* as autonomous agents acting *within* a discursively constituted world and whose everyday social practices are therefore inevitably subject to the various

constraints or limitations imposed through or by dominant discourses. With this understanding foregrounding their work, feminist theorists have carefully explored Foucault's ideas, adapting these for use as theoretical scaffolding for their analyses of women's social practices, notably in relation to their actions within various abusive contexts. Within these discussions, practices previously seen as pathological or abnormal have been recast or reframed as instances of resistance, thus addressing feminist concerns with retaining hold upon a notion of women's agency, even in relations of domination. One such project, Lees' research (1983 & 1997) exploring the ways threats of censorious remarks work to control young women's behavior, offers a specific example of the operations and effects of discourse (and its material aspects and consequences) in relation to the constitution of heterosexuality and teenage dating relationships. Not only does this work clearly demonstrate the material roots of discourse, it also provides a striking illustration of the ways in which discourse operates to maintain and reproduce aspects of the dominant social order – in this case gender. As Lees reports,

language (or the discourse of female reputation in particular) acts as a material discourse with its own determinate effects, operating as a form of control over their emotions and passions and steering girls into subordinate relationships with men (1997, p.4).

Clearly then, for some feminist researchers, at least some of the time, some of the tenets within Foucault's conceptual framework have something of value to contribute to their analysis. For many others though various aspects of his work constitute such intractable problems as to render them hazardous for any feminist appropriation (e.g. Fraser, 1981 & 1989).

Many of Foucault's insights are, in some ways, immensely attractive in terms of the possibilities of social change they imply. For instance, once the contingent and constructed character of various subjectivities or identities is recognized, the potential for change becomes clear. Equally clear however is that adoption of such a position potentially creates huge risk to the emancipatory political agenda of feminism. If, so this

line of argument goes, one acknowledges and accepts the instability of identity and subjectivity, then the categories justifying feminist identity politics and activism, indeed those justifying all forms of collective political endeavor, become unstable. Efforts to speak about or for ‘abused women’, ‘oppressed victims’ and so on, or address the issues they face, become far less politically sustainable when such collective identity categories come under challenge. This can, by extension, ultimately result in an intensely relativist and thus apolitical and anti-emancipatory position antithetical to the political underpinnings of feminist work.

Indeed, much anti-Foucault critique, particularly charges leveled by feminists, relates to the risks involved in translation of his framing into this world of political activism. These critiques concern what is perceived as the lack of a normative framework within his work (Hartsock, 1990 & 1996; Fraser, 1981 & 1989; de Laurentis, 1987; Nussbaum, 1999). This posed a seemingly insurmountable barrier to many feminists who argued that feminist politics, activism aimed at addressing gender inequality between men and women, could simply not exist without recourse to certain concepts. As Nancy Fraser charges, Foucault’s lack of a normative framework means that he is unable to offer any way to justify appeals for equality, rights, justice and so on, therefore making appropriation of his work hazardous for emancipatory social movements. How, it is asked, can Foucault offer a coherent political strategy if he rejects the normative foundations necessary to effective political action?

This critique has been deflected by some who point out that while Foucault did indeed reject the thought of a future world built upon any one set of normative foundations, illustrating throughout his lifetime the dangers immanent within such a strategy, he was intensely concerned with what he described as processes of normalization – normalizing power (McWhorter, 2004; McLaren, 2004). For Dianna Taylor, this is a program entirely congruent with a feminist agenda. As she notes, inquiry into such processes is central to feminist analysis. Indeed, she argues, “exposing and undermining the oppressive effects of normative gender roles, for example, is a common feminist practice” (2004, p.270).

Echoing this defense, feminists such as Sandra Bartky (1988) and Susan Bordo (2003) have used Foucault's 'docile body' paradigm and his ideas around technologies of normalization to good effect in producing unmistakably political analyses of various aspects of women's embodiment. In fact, critically interrogating particular norms such as gender roles can provide insight into the way these function and potentially open the way to less destructive or oppressive reconceptualizations. As these women argue, gaining a clearer understanding of the material effects of power upon bodies and selves need not entail a pessimistic acceptance of gender inequality or political helplessness. Both do, however, take Foucault to task over his lack of attention to the powerful structuring effects of gender discourse, amending his framing to accommodate this feminist agenda.

Foucault himself provides the supporting evidence for such revisions in his later introduction of the notion of 'technologies of the self'. What is introduced in this phase of his work is a more active, agentic human subject, capable of some, albeit limited, self-fashioning. As he explains, these technologies of the self

permit individuals to affect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and in this manner so to transform themselves, modify themselves (1988, p.18).

Although addressing feminist concerns here with the restoration of a modicum of agency, his formulation then becomes vulnerable to charges that he now presents an overly individualized and instrumental model of the self that lacks sufficient attention to the social (Allen, 2004). What results then is a version of the human subject which some have argued is more reflective of an atomistic abstract masculine notion of the self than of the relational version posited by feminist theorists (Grimshaw, 1993). It is argued that this particular view of the subject, as self-determining and agentic, tends to obscure the workings of social power relations, especially those gendered relations of oppression and domination brought into view by feminists.

Power

In responding to this argument some feminists have adopted a position whereby the self is conceptualized in a shifting and flexible fashion, thus reading Foucault's version of the self as one of process, self as a site of becoming (McWhorter, 2004; Butler, 2004). What these women see as important is a clearer notion of the workings of power, the ways power is implicated in the formation of various subjectivities, subjugated and otherwise. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, power is seen as always local, heterogeneous, fluid and flexible. This draws upon Foucault's metaphoric image of power as capillary, with the site of its operation being

the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives (1988, p.18).

Power is not and cannot be appropriated or taken up by either individuals or institutions, but rather is something they *participate in*. It is therefore inherently relational, circulating between individuals, things, and groups of people. In this form power is clearly diffuse, rather than concentrated and originating from any one central location, thus "spread throughout every corner of society, informing the social structure as a whole" (Hekman, 2004 p.200). Power is, however, not only limiting and constraining, as the juridical model of power would suggest, but is also simultaneously productive and enabling. Power is a

constitutive, omnipresent force that is built from 'below' in each social relation....a net of power relations, which build a kind of backdrop for society, institutions and actors...(Pritsch, 2004 p.122).

Power then is everywhere; we cannot be outside power and, therefore, as Foucault argues, wherever power exists, so too does resistance. Indeed the existence of power presupposes, is even conditional, upon freedom. To borrow again from Foucault, "power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free" (1983, 221), thus

implying always the possibility for the constitution of new subjectivities, or new relational orderings within a particular discourse. Many feminists, primarily those committed to juridical ‘top down’ analyses of power, take issue with this entwining of power and resistance, most notably the idea of power as ‘everywhere’. For these women, the idea that women can exercise power or offer effective resistance in the face of clearly gendered situations like rape or domestic violence is difficult to accept. For them, the ideas advanced by Foucault appear incapable of accounting for pervasive and persistent gender dominance and intractably asymmetrical power relations between men and women (Allen, 1999). As Hartsock charges, Foucault’s account of power “carries implications of equality and agency rather than the domination of the many by the few” (1990, p.169).

Domination

However, according to Margaret McLaren (2004), the way in which Foucault carefully distinguishes between power and domination meets this particular feminist objection. She notes his care in explaining his thesis that power is neither distributed nor exercised in an evenhanded or equal way. While Foucault does not suggest that relationships of domination, of violence directly acted on the body of the subject have ceased to exist, or never existed, he is clear in arguing that such relations do not account for the actions of disciplinary power. McLaren argues that, in his later work, Foucault claims relations of domination are clearly distinct from relations of power. While the latter are always fluid and therefore subject to challenge and reversal, domination involves particular formations of power relations locked together with particular relations of strategy, resulting in “static, ossified relations of power” (McLaren, 2004 p.220). This argument resonates with the feminist concept of patriarchy, accounting for the possibility of inequality and asymmetrically constituted and exercised power relations. Also supported here are feminist arguments around the need for collective action to drive social change. As McLaren notes, while Foucault describes power relations as being, to some degree at least, amenable to alteration at the level of the individual, change in relations of

domination, as expressed in the operation of the dominant discourses structuring our lives, requires the type of collective action advocated by feminists.

Discourse

Within poststructuralist thought the roles of discourse and language, the ways in which we communicate shared systems of meaning, are crucial. Language is considered to be both creative of, and created by, the discourses that influence human interactions and activity. In turn, discourse is seen as forming individual subjects and/or subjectivities, social practices and social relationships. Discourses therefore operate to structure the social worlds within which we live. In effect, discourse governs virtually all aspects of human lives – emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally, constructing the ways in which we feel, think and act (Townes, 2000). Simultaneous to this process, discourse is actively (and endlessly) constructed and reconstructed by individuals, both through their talk *and* their activity. For instance, we can talk of discourses of gender – ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, or of discourses governing social institutions such as ‘marriage’ or ‘the family’. That said, while it is important that we attend to the language employed within and around such discourses, what we must also do is explore the actual material *practices* by which they govern individual lives.

If we attend only to language, we risk losing sight of the ways in which the practices it constructs or structures impact upon everyday existence. It is important to retain sight of the ways in which our understandings of who we are and how we are to be who we are, are played out in a material context, with material embodied consequences upon individual lives. It is all very well to talk of reinterpreting or reclaiming words as a way to shift meaning, as illustrated in attempts by feminists since the 1970s to reframe our understandings of ‘victim’³² – moving our understanding of how to be or do this particular social identity - but such shifts do little to alter the immediate lived/felt experience of victimization or reduce its incidence. Change in these areas is far more

³² See Dunn, 2005 ‘Victims’ & ‘survivors’: Emerging vocabularies of motive for ‘battered women who stay’’ for a careful exposition of this particular project.

reliant on alteration of actual practice, shifts in policing for instance, or within the legal process, or in provision of services to victims, or the willingness of others to intervene and so on. In short, challenging dominant discourses and the understandings these provide for us remains important, but only insofar as we also keep sight of the ways in which individuals experience their lives within a discursively constituted world.

In a Foucauldian sense, the notion of discourse refers to systems of meaning which systematically 'form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Discourse is thus seen as

a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way produce a particular version of events (Burr, 2003, p.64).

It is also a concept inextricably linked to the specific material conditions surrounding and enabling that particular production (Hook, 2001). It is crucial to maintaining a feminist political stance to emphasize the importance of maintaining this linkage to the material conditions of people's lives. Discourse operates at a material level within the lives of individuals and cannot therefore be dissolved to a matter of mere language. As noted by Burr, some understandings of the world

sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others...they have implications for what it is permissible for different people to do, and for how they treat others' (2003, p.5).

This is a vital point, signaling the connection between various constructions of the world, human actors and power relations. The implications bound up in social activity are seldom simply neutral and will generally involve very concrete, and often far from benign, consequences for those involved in any particular instance of interaction. For Foucauldian advocates, this materiality is kept in central focus through the idea of discursive practices, the specific, individual but socially anchored everyday actions of

human actors; the means through which discourse (and associated relations of power) find their expression (Young, 1981; Hook, 2001).

A range of discourses can be considered hegemonic in scope and have historically operated to ensure the subordination and oppression of women (Gavey, 1990). However, because not all subject positions are equally situated and/or resourced within a particular discourse, hegemonic or otherwise, experience of its operation and effects may vary widely. What this suggests is that discourses are not unitary (although their effects may be experienced as so), but rather must be recognized as contradictory, multiple, always historically, socially and economically contingent, and widely varied in shape and power. It is important to note that even hegemonic discourse(s) do not enjoy or exercise unlimited, absolute and/or unchallengeable authority. They may, however, be so embedded within our culture that they are virtually invisible to analysis – as are the practices they involve and the philosophical foundations upon which they are constructed.

Thus, although discourse(s) make available (and also restrict) a range of subject positions, their embeddedness and/or hegemonic status may mean that individuals are unaware of both their placement within various discourses and/or the implications and consequences of this. For example, crudely put, patriarchal discourse generally privileges men over women – although various subject positions available within this discourse (for example, White, heterosexual, married, and so on) may work to privilege some women over others and disguise the power inhering to such positioning. From this perspective, individual subjects are both constrained and/or enabled by their positioning within or in relation to various discourses. At times this discrepancy may manifest in the experiences of a particular woman, one who finds herself privileged by her whiteness but at the same time marginalized by her disability, or sexuality, or socio-economic status and so on. In illustration of the experiential or material ‘reality’ of this, much debate within feminist circles over the past several decades has centred on the way in which feminist discourse has effectively silenced/excluded the voices of women outside the dominant white academic elite (hooks, 1984 & 1988). Fortunately, as these debates (and subsequent

changes) also illustrate, challenge and resistance by those positioned at the margins or outside of hegemonic discourse(s) can be both possible and effective.

Discursive shifting exemplified

A case in point here is the ‘discovery’ of domestic violence in the 1970s. Prior to this time abuse and/or violence directed at one’s spouse or partner was believed to be an unusual occurrence, happening infrequently and, when it did occur, thought to demonstrate some form of pathology either of the perpetrator or the marriage. Indeed, domestic violence as understood in contemporary western terms simply did not exist. Men who beat their wives were either mentally unwell, justifiably punishing some transgression committed by their wife, or responding to her masochistic desire for pain (Cunningham, Jaffe et al., 1998; Worden and Carlson, 2005). These understandings were enshrined within dominant discourses of the time such as those constituting political, legal and medical practice.

Within this framing those practicing within the realms of politics, the law, medicine and so on, all virtually exclusively male domains, went about their daily business guided by the commonsense understandings of that time. The state either put in place or failed to challenge legislation supporting the rights of men to ‘discipline’ their wives (Daniels, 1997). The legal profession administered that legislation in line with a patriarchal view of women as virtual chattels, possessions of their husbands. Police worked within the same set of understandings, treating beaten wives as somehow to blame for their victimization or, at the very best, misbehaving women deserving of punishment (Hoyle and Sanders, 2000). Doctors adhered to the same prescription, patching up physical damage, counseling wives to adjust their behaviour and providing various pharmaceutical aids to assist them to do so (Kurz and Stark, 1988; Stark and Flitcraft, 1996). On the terms of these dominant discourses then, women who were beaten and abused were unsurprisingly considered to be the agents of their own misfortune, failing to adequately perform in their roles as wives and/or mothers. As such, they were therefore in possession not only of the means to improve their marriages, but also had a responsibility to do so. In short, if

women would simply be ‘proper wives’, accept the rightness of their husband’s control and adjust their behaviour accordingly, then the need for discipline would disappear, as would the unusual event of marital violence.

Around the late 1960s and early 1970s though, as a result of the emergence of the Women’s Liberation movement (itself growing out of various other civil rights struggles around issues such as race and sexuality) and the development of distinctly feminist analysis and theory, the conditions enabling challenge of these understandings were brought into being. Feminists developed concepts such as patriarchy and gender roles and employed these to bring into view the practices that supported and perpetuated inequitable and unjust social positioning between men and women, along with the patriarchally inspired philosophical foundations underpinning these. Domestic violence became visible. Physical discipline of wives was no longer totally acceptable³³ and recognition of the gendered character of domestic violence was now widespread³⁴. This ‘discovery’ of domestic violence constitutes a graphic example of the way in which dominant discourse, in this case, the discourse of patriarchy, masks the very existence of a range of social phenomena and the various subjectivities they enable and/or constrain.

‘Battered women’: Constitution & consequences

The notion of discourse as canvassed here opens the possibility of a glimpse of some of the less immediately apparent influences in the lives of victims/survivors of abuse. How do/did they position themselves within dominant discourses of ‘motherhood’, ‘femininity’ or ‘gender’, ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ and so on? And, to return to the ideas around social bonds canvassed previously, how do they understand their bonds with others within these specific social relationships? What particular everyday practices enabled and/or constrained the ways in which they (and others) were able to understand such positionings? And, in a closely related question, how did they construct their

³³ Though see Leibrich & Paulin, 1995, Hitting home: Men talk about male partner abuse of women, a report providing statistical evidence that up until very recently many New Zealanders felt that such disciplinary action was justified and acceptable in specific circumstances.

³⁴ Worden & Carlson, 2005, in Attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence: Results of a public opinion survey: II. Beliefs about causes demonstrate however that this is a far from universal shift.

understandings of what it means to be a victim of abuse, and what did these understandings (and associated practices) mean in terms of the ways in which they lived their day to day experience of abuse? Foregrounding the notion of social bonds highlights the relevance of questions around the ways in which participants believed others understood these issues and the consequences of such beliefs (accurate or otherwise). Various images, or discursive constructions of 'battered women' emerged from participants' stories - both in terms of how they saw themselves and what they believed others thought (or were likely to think once they knew of the abuse). The power of these images exerted considerable influence upon their coping and/or help-seeking strategies.

Anita and Debra, for example had particular understandings of what sort of women constituted the client group of organizations like Women's Refuge. These beliefs, located in a particular discourse of social class, effectively served to isolate each of them from a source of potentially valuable assistance. As Debra said,

middle-class women, like myself, [are] probably as beaten as more lower class people are. That's probably sounding terrible. There's just not - I don't know - Refuge always sounds like - someone like me who has the car and the pay packet, it would never occur to me to go to a Refuge (Debra).

In a similar vein, Anita noted her belief that

only gang member's girlfriends went to Refuge, and they were scum anyway. That's, you know, because I was associated with gang members and solo-mums, being a school teacher and being from this family. Oh no, I'm a lady. I wouldn't go to anything like that (Angie).

For these two women then, the far from positive images they held (and assumed others shared) of who battered women were, along with their knowledge that they certainly did

not 'fit' such images, meant that they were unable to take up an identity that they believed was needed to rightfully utilize Refuge services.

Other women noted different but similarly constraining images. Rachel, for instance had a clearly shameful picture of abuse victims as weak and dependant individuals, along with an understanding of the level of violence necessary to qualify for help from support agencies. These were positions she strongly resisted for herself in explaining why she did not consider using either Police or Refuge services.

As far as like Women's Refuge went, I didn't actually see myself as being in, like, needing someone else. You know, I just thought, you know, I can do this. Quite a strong, independent woman. Don't need anyone's help. But, yeah, I realized after the second time that there were lots of things that I needed and I went to counseling. And even that was sort of...I don't know, I guess there is a little bit of shame in it. Like I should have...yeah, I hate asking for other people's help, I guess, and that's kind of why I did it on my own...yeah. Yeah, I just, I never saw it being so bad that I needed the Police...even though it was really bad (Rachael).

In Rachel's account we see traces of the ways in which discursively constructed images can operate in a clearly material way, working to figuratively if not literally bar access to some pathways. For Anita, Debra and Rachel, to claim an identity as a battered woman involved assuming a range of unattractive social positions and personal identities for themselves. Not only would this have entailed an abandonment of various understandings of themselves, but also their replacement with notions of weakness and dependence, and of being seen in the same light as members of stigmatized social groups. In Anita's case, for instance, this meant potentially being placed in the same category as the economically disadvantaged, beaten down and helpless girlfriends of gang members, an unthinkable categorization for a 'professional lady from a good family'.

Social bonds: A poststructuralist view

So how then do these accounts ‘fit’ with a discursive theory of the participants’ positioning? This is the type of question pursued in a variety of ways by feminists interested in bending the work of Foucault to an emancipatory political agenda, with many having taken up this project in creative and potentially useful ways. For the purposes of this particular project, one such is Judith Butler in her 2004 revisiting of Foucault’s ideas around the body and power in which she suggests that we (as feminists) may have been too hasty in our reading of the later Foucault. She produces a revisionist framing that resonates strikingly with many of the central questions plaguing feminist analyses of gendered violence against women, particularly those centered on how and why many women remain emotionally connected or bonded to their abusers, even in extremely violent and cruel circumstances.

Butler argues for a rethinking of Foucault’s description of the effect of power as one of recognition. Through processes of normalizing power, we become and are seen by others to become. We achieve recognition, both of ourselves and from others, by taking on, or being awarded, positions in relation to the ‘norms of recognizability’ that surround us. In effect, power, operating through social norms, constitutes the mechanism by which we are connected to ourselves and others. According to Butler,

this means that one’s fundamental attachment to oneself, an attachment without which one cannot be, is constrained in advance by social norms, and that the failure to conform to these norms puts at risk that capacity to sustain a sense of one’s enduring status as a subject (Butler, 2004 p. 191).

Therefore, she suggests, challenge to current norms constitutes a fundamental and deeply hazardous risk to one’s very sense of being, arising out of the vulnerability created by the individual’s necessary desire for recognition. The effect of relations of power then is to impose

a law of truth that the subject is *obliged* to recognize...In order to be, we might say, we must become recognizable, but to challenge the norms by which recognition is conferred is, in some ways, to risk one's very being, to be questionable in one's ontology, to risk one's very recognizability as a subject (2004, p. 191).

Although couched in very different language, this argument echoes that advanced by Thomas Scheff regarding the social bonds by which individuals are tied into the wider social net. Similarly, the risk and vulnerability noted by Butler (2004) parallel that described by Scheff in terms of 'bond threat'. Both theorists, albeit with differing emphases, throw into stark relief the crucial importance of our connections to the social world, our attachments or bonds with others. Butler's Foucauldian conceptualization of power as simultaneously productive and constraining though, as illustrated by her emphasis upon processes of normalization, provides a useful corrective to Scheff's 'top down', constraining model of power. On the other hand, Scheff's concentration on the influence of emotion in governing the ways in which our bonds or attachments to others are shaped and experienced provides a notion of the 'affective taste' or 'emotional coloration' (Bartky, 1988) of women's lives that I believe is necessary to an embodied feminist analysis but which is largely absent in Butler's account.

Thinking, writing AND feeling emotion

One feminist poststructuralist who does address this lack in attending specifically to the 'affective taste' of women's lives is Elspeth Probyn, particularly in *Blush: Faces of shame*, her 2005 discussion of shame, as it is felt and lived, but also as it is understood. In this work Probyn put forward an especially 'up close and personal' version of this particular emotion which resonated strongly with my own. In exploring the way in which a sense of shame had come to permeate my experience of conducting this research I had become increasingly troubled by how academic expositions around this particular emotion state were expressed. Most of these accounts were presented at 'arms length', writing dryly and impersonally of something, an emotion, which I was experiencing in an

extremely personal, even visceral way. A painfully graphic illustration of the power of these feelings, the material influence they exerted upon my everyday behavior, was a period of time during which I found myself actively evading contact with my supervisors and anyone else likely to mention the research – including participants – literally hiding in my office as I avoided engagement with a project that had become intensely shame-filled.

My attempts to understand the sense of shame which was creating such paralysis in my life included an exploration of the sociological literature around emotion. Given my academic work environment this seemed a logical place to search for answers and a relatively coherent explanatory framework of shame began to emerge easily enough. Erving Goffman's interactionist work concerned with embarrassment, stigma and management of self resonated with some aspects of what I was experiencing. Thomas Scheff's presentation of the pervasiveness of shame within social life, built upon Goffman's earlier efforts, certainly spoke to much of what I was feeling. Satisfied with much of what these authors suggested, I was nonetheless troubled by their lack of attention to issues of gender so in hopes of finding a quick and easy corrective I turned to the relatively small body of work in this area produced by feminist writers. Alison Jagger (1990) and Airlie Hochschild's (1983) Marxist inspired analyses were two such authors, along with Sandra Bartky (1996) and Susan Bordo (1990)³⁵. The way in which they all placed women and women's experiences at the very center of their analyses certainly addressed my concerns around the gendered aspects of shame neglected by so many of the men writing in this area. Yet I still came away from reading their work with niggling concerns, these emerging most strongly when I began attempting to weave their ideas around my participants' stories.

I found I could intellectually grasp, understand and even see how I could analytically apply the perspective being put forward by these theorists, especially the feminist poststructuralist accounts of the authors noted above. However, I immediately ran into

³⁵ Other more recent work included that of Sarah Ahmed (2004), Mo Hume (2007), Denise Riley (2005) and Ngai (2005).

difficulties as I tried to adopt the academic style within which their expositions were couched. As already noted, most of these authors wrote explicitly about shame, yet somehow I found myself not quite able to connect with the emotional content of much of their work. On reflection I realized this was largely due to the distanced abstract style in which so many of them wrote. This left me with a sense that this thing, this emotion called shame, was a feeling to which they were immune, or at least did not appear to see any necessity to communicate their personal experience of. I found this particularly disconcerting in relation to Scheff's work given that he presented shame as THE primary social emotion - an emotion state permeating virtually every instance of social interaction. While producing an argument I found convincing on so many levels - it certainly seemed to describe in painfully accurate detail my own experience - he presented this in an unfeeling and colorless way with few traces of any actual emotional engagement with, or experience of his subject matter.

My analysis of participants' accounts, when phrased in the impersonal language and style seemingly so popular in academic expositions of emotion, was entirely unsatisfying in its bland abstractness. I simply could not manage to convey any sense of the powerful emotionality the women had expressed in their stories, a failure that served to further magnify my feelings of inadequacy and shame surrounding the research. More recently, as emotion has begun to assume a more 'respectable' place in academic theorizing, a small number of specifically poststructuralist accounts of emotion have begun to emerge, including authors such as Sara Ahmed (2004), Denise Riley (2005), Elspeth Probyn (2005), Mo Hume (2007) and Kristyn Gorton (2007). It was as I sifting through this small range of poststructuralist work as I searched for a way to adequately express my experience of this disquieting emotional context that I encountered these words by Elspeth Probyn, who captured my sense of extreme discomfort as she wrote that shame

is a painful thing to write about. It gets into your body. It gets to you...an exposure of the intimacies of selves in public (Probyn, 2005, p.130).

It was clear as I read her work that Probyn had experienced much of what I was struggling to enunciate around the difficulties of placing/writing emotion within an academic framing, most notably in trying to work within "the stringent rules of emotionless rationality, especially in regards to research and writing" (Woodward cited in Probyn, 2005, p. 133). These rules can help to protect and insulate researchers from "being invaded by the affective and troubling nature of research" (Probyn, 2005, p.133), an important consideration perhaps when dealing with particularly painful subject areas such as rape or violence (Campbell, 2001, Gilbert, 2001, Rager, 2005 & Wincup, 2001). Such shielding though, while allowing researchers to avoid experiencing potential pain or trauma, can also leach out much potential color, complexity and, ultimately, political utility, from research results. What was so different about Probyn's account was the way in which she made no attempt whatsoever to avoid close engagement with her subject matter³⁶. Indeed, as illustration for her argument she drew almost exclusively upon intimately personal experiences, describing and trying to make sense of her feelings of sometimes excruciating shame around her work.

Probyn herself is inspired by the work of Sylvin Tomkins, a psychologist researching and writing in the 1950s and 60s. She finds his theoretical framing convincing and his emotionally rich, almost poetic writing style attractive. While I have some reservations around his conceptualization of emotionality overall, mainly his strongly biological, in places almost mechanical framing, the way he manages to maintain a sense of the inherently relational, contingent and 'alive' nature of shame appeals to me strongly. The following passage is worth quoting at length because it so dramatically illustrates the power of his prose to grasp this embodied aliveness.

If you like to be kissed and I like to kiss you, we may enjoy each other. If you like to be sucked and bitten and I like to suck or bite you, we may enjoy each other. If you like to have your skin rubbed and I like to do this to you, we can enjoy each

³⁶ A similar style can be seen in the work of Anne Lyerly (2006). This is an account which uses the 1990 work of Bartky to explore women's experiences of giving birth to and describes the ways in which women's shame is reinforced by dominant strains of birthing discourse and practice. Lyerly's account provides graphic and persuasive evidence in support of her argument that shame can be seen as closely implicated in the constitution of women's subjectivity.

other. If you enjoy being hugged and I like to hug you, it can be mutually enjoyable...If you enjoy communicating your experiences and ideas and aspirations and I enjoy being informed about the experiences, ideas and aspirations of others, we can enjoy each other....You may crave much body contact and silent communication and I wish to talk. You wish to stare deeply into my eyes, but I achieve intimacy only in the dark in sexual embrace. You wish to be fed and cared for, and I wish to exhibit myself and be looked at. You wish to be hugged and have your skin rubbed, and I wish to reveal myself only by discussing my philosophy of life...You wish to communicate your most personal feelings about me, but I achieve social intimacy only through a commonly shared opinion about the merits of something quite impersonal, such as a particular theory or branch of knowledge or an automobile” (cited in Probyn, 2005, p.xi).

For me, these words captured in an exquisitely poetic but cringingly painful way the visceral experience of feeling (or the risk of feeling) shame. More importantly, Probyn's choice of this particular passage as the vehicle to convey her understanding of Tomkins' position left me in no doubt that she intended offering a text that challenged. This was to be written from an intensely personal place of knowing and feeling. For instance, early in this book Probyn describes her experience of presenting a paper at an academic conference. The presentation, to do with shame, anorexia, disgust and fat bodies, was less than positively received by her audience. Indeed, the reaction was one of hugely discomfoting silence. She writes:

I remember quaking as I put overheads on the projector. I'd probably given something like a hundred conference papers by that time, so the shaking was unusual. I looked at my audience. My voice caught as my gaze encountered blankness in return. All I could feel was unease, even contempt. In the question period afterward, there was an absolute absence, a void of interest and engagement. I felt undone; I felt ashamed of my display, which seemed highly emotional in the vacuum of the conference room. I went home and had a good cry... (Probyn, 2005 p.11).

If engaging her reader was her intent with this passage, her success was unpleasantly clear to me as I found myself literally reliving the burning shame of a virtually identical experience of my own. Throughout the course of the book she returns repeatedly to personal encounters like this, both public and private, as illustration of her work. It is this use of intimate and normally private, almost secret stories, which give her account a 'lived in', inhabited quality, with a sense of shame and shamefulness as embodied in the everyday lives of individuals, rather than abstract and distanced. Whether intentional or not, this is perhaps also what provides its distinctly feminist flavor as she demonstrates time and again her refusal of any academic separation of public and private, personal and political. It should be clear by now that Probyn's work around shame, especially the way she 'writes shame', entralls me. Barring the odd section from Sylvain Tomkins - most notably those cited above - I have found no other author who manages to write as emotionally about emotion, who is capable of communicating such a sense of embodied feeling as vividly as Probyn does. While much of this effect is perhaps down to her skillful prose, her commitment to Foucauldian notions of human subjectivity as fluid and multiple and her comfort with conflict and contradiction as inevitable aspects of daily life also help her to avoid the colorless rigidity evident in much academic writing around emotion.

Probyn and shame

The clearest demonstration of her poststructuralist positioning can be seen in the way in which she resolves, or rather refuses, the terminological warfare surrounding the emotion versus affect debate. Argument, primarily driven by disciplinary differences between advocates of a sociological approach and those working from a psychological perspective, has been focused upon what precisely constitutes human feelings. On the one hand, sociological discussion tends to favor predominantly social constructionist explanations. Roughly speaking, from this position emotions are seen as the individual and subjective experience of socially constituted rules around emotional expression. On the other hand, those favoring a psychological explanation put forward a version of affect

as biologically innate, albeit socially influenced or flavored. Individuals are thus born endowed with a range of emotional capacities, the effects and functioning of which can be traced by objective scientific processes and experimentation. Attached to the former position by virtue of her disciplinary background, yet powerfully attracted by the strongly biologically influenced psychological arguments put forward by Tomkins, Probyn takes the only course possible, steering her way carefully between the two opposing camps and insisting that both offer valuable insights to our understanding around how and what it is that people feel. Why, she asks, must adoption of one necessitate dismissal of the other? Why can we not instead accommodate elements of both, accepting both biological and social explanations? After all, one thing that Probyn notes as unmistakable and beyond argument is that our feelings are always and unavoidably embodied and therefore clearly attached to our biological functioning. At the same time though she notes the unmistakable argument that the ways in which we can experience and/or talk about these feelings cannot be divorced from the social world and our various places within it. The important point for Probyn³⁷ is

to understand what shame does to bodies and what connected bodies do to the organization of the social (2005, p.27).

In order to demonstrate the interconnectedness of physiological and social aspects of shame, Probyn emphasizes Tomkins' linking of shame and interest; the linkage illustrated so graphically and painfully in the 'ifs', 'mays' and 'wishings' of the passages cited above.

Shame and interest

For Tomkins, shame results from an incomplete reduction of an individual's interest in some other person or object. We feel shame because we are interested, whether we are aware of this interest or not, in an ongoing connection or relationship with another and

³⁷ This emphasis upon the unavoidably embodied nature of emotion and the constitutive effect this has upon our sense of self is also central to the work of Sara Ahmed (2004).

this interest is either not reciprocated, is rejected, or in some way interrupted. As Probyn explains,

without interest there can be no shame; conversely, shame alerts us to things, people, and ideas that we didn't even realize we wanted....highlights unknown or unappreciated investments [and] illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others" (2005, p. 14).

The premature and incomplete severing of interest results in an embodied or physiologically 'felt' experience of shame, in more extreme cases, a physical blushing as the body reacts to the awareness that it is somehow 'wrong' or out of place;

the body calling out its hopes and discomfort....the body saying that it cannot fit in, although it desperately wants to (Probyn, 2005 p. 72)

However, moving on from here, Probyn attempts to demonstrate that no sense of inevitability attends particular emotional experience and particular circumstances need not necessarily lead to preordained or predictable results. Conflicting or contradictory emotional responses or experiences then are, she implies, little more than a reflection of the conflict and contradiction characterizing human subjectivity. For Probyn, possession of a shamed or shameful identity is not something that one is inevitably tied to for all time. Shame is seen as positive or productive, in a Foucauldian sense, in that it always produces further effects, "it adds rather than takes away...[producing] more shame [and/or] more interest" (Probyn, 2005 p. 15). It serves as a warning to the individual impelling them to address the shameful behaviors marking their attachment to that shameful identity. Taking corrective measures - generally through alteration or cessation of problematic actions - effectively cancels out the individual's membership of or attachment to that shamed/shameful position and thus, in Probyn's terms, allowing or legitimizing their interest in connection once more.

But...

Despite her skill with language and the emotional and intuitive appeal her eloquent argument holds for me, I find myself unable to completely embrace her position. I find convincing and can intellectually grasp Probyn's interpretation of Tomkins' theory. Certainly the linking of interest and shame she emphasizes seems entirely sensible and fitting. I also accept and intellectually comprehend her Foucauldian reading of shame as productive and therefore positive, in the sense that some further effect is always produced by shame. Stepping back from an intellectual or logical position though and bringing participants' accounts to the conversation, I find myself conflicted. On the one hand it is tempting to drape Probyn's seductively elegant theory over their words. I suspect that the resulting analysis could be both coherent and convincing and would in all likelihood provide some useful insight into how and why women stay with their abusers despite feeling deeply ashamed. From Probyn's perspective, these women could be considered to be attempting to preserve and continue a relationship in which they were deeply interested and invested. The shame they experience could be read as extremely useful to them in signaling their need to renew or repair whatever was interfering with that interest. As Probyn notes, the result of experiencing a feeling of shame can be to

set off a nearly involuntary reevaluation of one's self and one's actions. This may also compel a radical rethinking and a shift in disposition. Through feeling shame, the body inaugurates an alternative way of being in the world (2005, p. 55-56).

Such an account seemingly gives little cause for quarrel and may go a long way towards explaining some troubling actions on the part of abuse victims, for instance hiding or justifying their partner's violence. These would now be interpreted as entirely sensible and understandable strategies aimed at preserving vital intimate connections, an argument mirroring those put forward in what have been termed 'survivor accounts' (Dunn, 2005).

I found myself troubled by some persistently niggling queries and doubts as I considered this course though - strangely enough these questions are rather similar to those I've

noted earlier in relation to other theoretical framings. For instance, the idea of shame as performing a signal or warning function parallels that put forward by Goffman and Scheff and is one that while appealing on a commonsense level, becomes distinctly problematic from a feminist perspective. Although weakening Goffman and Scheff's unmistakably conservative focus, Probyn's work remains vulnerable to similar complaints. While the idea of shame as a signal is, in itself, straight forward, what exactly is being signaled here and can this really be considered 'positive' or 'productive'? In an abstract sense the answer must be yes. Positive and productive can indeed be read as value free terms merely indicating the presence or production of some effect, with no attached judgment of good, bad, right or wrong. In the context of women's material embodied lives though, would the same answer hold? The answer must again be yes, but the absence of moral interest in the effect produced makes this an unsatisfactory response.

For participants in this research their experiences of shame were indeed productive of various effects, but I question whether these could be considered positive. Such questioning though depends entirely upon the philosophical perspective and political agenda of the questioner. My location as a feminist for instance demands that I challenge a status quo that leads to or supports the victimization of women, in this instance the hegemony exerted by patriarchally organized social power relations. For me, the questions were and are to do with what was and is being produced or reproduced in such circumstances? What particular subjectivities were being encouraged by feelings of shame within abusive relationships? Similarly, what particular identities or subject positions were constrained by these same emotional experiences? What courses of action were allowed or disallowed? How?

With these questions in mind then, a recap is timely. What has been gained from the above discussion? How does it assist in answering the questions of the previous paragraph? Of most value to me is a sense of 'permission' gained from Elspeth Probyn's work. Certainly I feel she has shown me the possibility of giving emotional life to academic analysis. Her reading of Tomkins' work, especially his thesis linking shame and

interest, fit smoothly with Thomas Scheff's social bonds and go a long way towards explaining his emphasis upon shame's ubiquitous presence in everyday social interaction. She manages to bring shame and bodies, the social and the individual, the general and the particular, together in a way which preserves feminist politics yet retains the fluidity and flexibility of poststructuralist analysis. As she notes,

The feeling of shame teaches us about our relation to others. Shame makes us feel proximity differently, understood as the bodies relation to itself, the self to its self, and comprehended within a sphere that is human and nonhuman, universal and particular, specific and general (2005, p.35).

For these points alone, her framing offers huge potential to this project. My only real objection is in relation to her presentation of shame and shaming as a positive social force. I believe this claim must be treated with caution, indeed should not be considered without careful qualification. Probyn herself is clearly aware of the dangerously conservative risks her interpretation raises. As she explains;

Shame can serve to produce and police a certain morality....if shame is construed only as a means of reproach and becomes a way of wielding power under the guise of moral rectitude, its uses are likely to be unpalatable. Moreover, for those groups that have born the brunt of this type of insidious power, shame is something to be feared (2005 p. 94).

So, with this caution in place, it is now time to turn to more specific attention to the ways in which participants understood and explained their experiences of abuse, shame and social bondedness. This discussion will be scaffolded by concepts drawn from most of the authors encountered to date – although most will be subject to a particular interpretation inspired by my understanding of Probyn's feminist poststructuralist orientation/interest. Scheff's social bonds will occupy significant space, though explored now in terms of Tomkins' 'interest', but an interest constituted within a specific context – that of patriarchally organized gendered power relations. Shame will retain the centrality

awarded by Scheff but emphasis will be upon the everyday material, embodied and gendered consequences of its operations. To borrow again from Probyn, the most important task will be to “understand what shame does to bodies and what connected bodies do to the organization of the social” (2005, p. 27).

The main conceptual vehicles chosen to carry this task through will be the Foucauldian notions of discourse and discursive practices. The first is needed to place these women’s stories within a context bigger than each of their individual lives; the discourses within which they are positioned and which enable and/or constrain their everyday lives. The lived experience of some discourses, for instance, those governing gender and femininity are shared by all participants, although individual positioning and understandings within these differ. Some others, like those of motherhood, are not. All shared, though with differing understandings and interpretations, the experience of living within dominant discursive constructions of abuse. The second concept, discursive practices, will be equally important as it is these, the ways we do the things we do as we go about our daily lives that illustrate most clearly the processes of dominant discourses in operation. This serves to emphasize that discourse does not operate on a purely abstract theoretical level but works through material and embodied practices, and produces material and embodied consequences in peoples’ lives.

Chapter six

Discourse(s) of abuse

Participants' accounts offered up detail of a wide range of discourses and associated subject positions with which the women made sense of and went about their daily lives. The ways in which they lived their positioning as women, wives, mothers, girlfriends, partners, granddaughters, employees/employers and so on were diverse and drew upon various understandings of how one should go about carrying out these apparently different social positions. Also evident in their stories however was illustration of the ways in which these requirements conflicted and/or became contradictory for women living within the context of an abusive intimate relationship.

The following section will attempt to tease out the various discourses and discursive practices constituting abuse drawn upon by participants as they talked about their experiences. The women's stories will be juxtaposed with a close reading of the textual resources, policies and practices of several key players in New Zealand's violence prevention sphere today. This path has been chosen to demonstrate and emphasize that, in this analysis, discursive resources are not merely abstract analytic tools, but rather powerful material forces within people's lives, granted their materiality by and through legislation, policies and operational practices. My hope with this approach is that it will enable me to begin picking apart the various sets of ideas, assumptions, practices and social relations circulating around, and about, abuse. The intent of this strategy is to bring into view the specific subject positions that were/are enabled and/or constrained through discursive resources and their everyday enactment. In this way I will begin to explicate the processes through which subjectivities constituted by these resources are made shameful and/or shaming for women living through abuse. Or, put another way, I wish to make evident the character of various central and peripheral ways of constituting and/or understanding 'abuse' and its consequences for women victims. An important aspect of this discussion will be to draw attention to the ways in which particular understandings worked to promote, produce (and sometimes disqualify) particular

emotional responses and therefore govern how participants were able to react and/or respond to the abuse in their lives. And, consequently, how these elements came together to constrain and shape the women's social interactions, particularly those directed towards accessing help or support.

At this point it is worth stressing that I understand discourse as doing far more than simply providing us with an interpretive framework. The key role played by discourse(s) in the actual construction of social 'objects', including subjects and identities must be kept to the forefront. As Foucault notes, the concept of discourse denotes social 'practices that systematically form the object of which they speak' (1972, p.49). Like all such social phenomena the subject positions of 'abuse victim' are both constituted by and constitutive of the discourses we use to describe it. Language therefore is not neutral, not a mere linguistic device enabling communication with and about the world we inhabit (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). An understanding such as this masks the immense constructive power of the accounts we use to describe and explain our lives. Participants' accounts will illustrate the ways their sometimes contradictory understandings of 'abuse' tended to conflict with other subject positions and worked to constrain some actions and enable others, while rendering some literally unthinkable. As Phillips & Jorgensen (2002) note, it is in analysis of the ways elements of a particular discourse come together, in this case, the discourse of abuse, that the most insight into social processes may be gained. As they suggest,

when two or more discourses in the same area present different understandings of the world, the researcher can begin to ask what consequences it would have if one understanding were to be accepted instead of the other (2002, p.146).

So, to summarize the section to come, what follows will be an exploration of 'official' or political/legal abuse discourse, along with discussion around the various discursive resources drawn upon by participants. The intention here though is to provide more than merely a 'grocery list' of the discursive content of their stories. While this is a useful and fascinating task in itself, more important to me are the internal contradictions and

inconsistencies readily apparent in all discourses – a dissonance clearly evident in the ways we speak of abuse. The aim therefore is two-fold, to tease out these conflicting and discordant elements *and* the material consequences these create in women’s everyday lives. But, before this can begin, in the interests of providing an anchor point for participants’ stories, some historical and legislative contextualization is necessary.

History and legislation

So what then are the central elements of ‘official’, or perhaps ‘legal/political’ abuse discourse in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand? Despite extensive feminist campaigns throughout the 1970s (Dann, 1985), in both a legislative and public sense, domestic violence in New Zealand prior to 1982 was considered largely a private matter (Barwick *et al*, 2000). An official or political/legal discursive shift was however signaled with the advent of the Domestic Protection Act 1982. The Act extensively widened the range of remedies open to protect those experiencing domestic violence and included the introduction of a non-violence order. Arguably the most revolutionary aspect of the Act, this order allowed police to intervene directly in domestic disputes and provided them powers of arrest without having to formally charge alleged perpetrators with a criminal offence. However, despite extensive use, the Act became seen as “too restrictive for the needs of modern society” (Barwick *et al*, 2000) and following investigation by the Department of Justice through the late 1980s it was ultimately replaced by the Domestic Violence Act 1995. A key aspect of this Act was the removal of the non-violence order contained within the Domestic Protection Act 1982 and its replacement with a new protection order. The aims of this legislation are set out in Section 5 of the Act as being to reduce and prevent violence in domestic relationships by:

- (a) Recognising that domestic violence, in all its forms, is unacceptable behaviour; and
- (b) Ensuring that, where domestic violence occurs, there is effective legal protection for its victims.

Coming into force on 1 July 1996, the Act introduced a wide range of changes, both in terms of eligibility, who the Act protected, how and from what, and how such protections were to be obtained and enforced. Eligibility is vastly broadened, with the new Act including

children and young people, siblings, parents and children, members of the same whanau or culturally-recognised family group, boyfriends and girlfriends and people in same-gender relationships, [it] also applies to any person in a close personal relationship with another person (Barwick *et al*, 2000, p.19).

The range of behaviors providing grounds for granting a protection order are also far wider in the new legislation, now encompassing not only physical violence, but also sexual, psychological and emotional abuse, including threats, intimidation, harassment or damage to property. In addition, the impact of abuse on children is recognized, with the witnessing of abuse of a family member by a child now seen as an instance of psychological abuse, regardless of whether or not the abuse is directed at the child. Under the Act, a protection order may be granted based on either a single instance of violence, or a number of incidents that form part of an ongoing pattern.

The new protection order offers a wider range of options or choices for victims and attempt to move away from the notion that the only remedy for an abusive relationship is separation. These Orders apply to the perpetrator of the violence and state that they may not use any form of violence, including threats or property damage, against the protected person or encourage anyone else to do so. Respondents may also be directed to attend whatever violence prevention programs the Family Court deems appropriate, for instance, anger management courses. These directions by the court are supported by various legal sanctions for non-compliance, although recent research suggests that compliance remains inadequately policed (Robertson & Busch *et al*, 2007). Protection Orders may contain non-contact conditions directing that the perpetrator must keep away from the victim and make no attempt to contact them. However, if the protected person is still living with the

perpetrator or wishes to do so, the non-contact conditions will not apply, but the non-violence conditions remain.

The Domestic Violence Act (DVA) arguably provides some of the most comprehensive domestic violence legislation in the world and the Act, along with its clear moral/normative intent and inclusive definitions, is implemented and administered by a police force and a judiciary officially and publicly committed to the reduction (and presumably the eventual eradication) of family violence (New Zealand Police, 2004; Family Court, 2004). Illustration of the official police stance, and the importance accorded the issue, was first demonstrated in the ‘Family Violence is a Crime’ campaign conducted by the police in the 1990s; a campaign underpinned by specific domestic abuse training for police personnel and the development of formal working partnerships with community anti-abuse agencies such as Women’s Refuge and other anti-violence networks (Hann, 2001).

Recent initiatives

Further demonstration of official government commitment to family violence prevention can be seen in the September 2001 release of the ‘Family Violence Prevention in New Zealand: Plan of Action’ by then Minister of Social Development, Steve Maharey (Ministry of Social Development). This document, the result of what the government describes as an extensive research and community consultation process, outlined a range of strategies aimed at addressing the main issues and gaps in the family violence prevention field. The Plan of Action was followed by the February 2002 launch of ‘Te Rito: New Zealand Family Violence Strategy’, a five year implementation strategy of the aims identified in the Action Plan developed by the Family Violence Focus Group, an advisory committee formed of representatives of a number of government and non-government organisations³⁸ after publication of the Action Plan. From these reports

³⁸ the National Network of Stopping Violence Services, National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, National Collective of Rape Crisis and Related Groups, Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, Barnardos, Age Concern New Zealand, Relationship Services, Child Abuse Prevention Services New

came the Family Violence Ministerial team³⁹ and the Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families⁴⁰, supported by an advisory group⁴¹, with the work of all groups guided by the ambitious vision set out in Te Rito, “to create a society where families/whanau are living free from violence” (2002, p.5).

What can be seen clearly in the legal/political positioning outlined above is the incorporation/co-option of (some aspects of) feminist analyses of violence, most notably, understandings of domestic violence as intimately connected to issues of power and control and gender equality/equity, and understandings that domestic violence *is* a public, rather than private issue. *But*, this co-option is accomplished within a largely unchallenged context of patriarchally structured and hierarchically ordered gendered power relations. This is well demonstrated by the ordering of the various groups outlined above. While (ostensibly) operating within a framework of equitable collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organisations, there is a distinctly

Zealand, Pacific Island Women's Project, Ministry of Social Development, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Services, Ministry of Justice including the Crime Prevention Unit, Department for Courts, Department of Corrections, New Zealand Police, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Specialist Education Services, Early Childhood Development, Te Puni Kokiri, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Department of Internal Affairs including Ethnic Affairs, Treasury and the Accident Compensation Corporation.

³⁹ The Family Violence Ministerial Team consists of the Minister for Social Development and Employment, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Police, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Justice, the Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment (CYF), the Minister of Women's Affairs, and the Chairperson of the Open Hearing into the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children.

⁴⁰ The Taskforce for Action on Violence Within Families, established in June 2005, to advise the Family Violence Ministerial Team consists of the Chief Executives of: the Ministry of Social Development, the Accident Compensation Corporation, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Ko-kiri, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Te Rito Advisory Committee (National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, Jigsaw (formerly Child Abuse Prevention Services) and Relationship Services, the Family Services National Advisory Council (CCS and Pacific Trust Canterbury), the Secretary for Education, the Director-General of Health, the Secretary for Justice, the Commissioner of New Zealand Police, the Chief District Court Judge, the Principal Family Court Judge, the Children's Commissioner, the Chief Families Commissioner, the Deputy Chief Executive, Social Services Policy, Ministry of Social Development.

⁴¹ The Advisory Group to the Taskforce, formed to support and advise the Taskforce, consists of: Taskforce member agencies, the Department of Corrections, Office of Ethnic Affairs, Maori Women's Welfare League, The National NGO Family Violence Prevention Alliance (comprising: Age Concern New Zealand, Barnardos, Family Planning Association, Jigsaw, National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, National Network of Stopping Violence Services, New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, Relationship Services, Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, Save the Children New Zealand, UNICEF New Zealand), Northern Family Violence Prevention Group, Pacific Islands Women's Project Aotearoa, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Child, Youth and Family.

hierarchical ordering of power and responsibility with leadership and resources controlled from within the state structure. What is most apparent here are the taken for granted assumptions underpinning state policy formulation and legislative implementation. In this model actual decision-making concerning why, how and when action is to be taken (or not) occurs at Ministerial level, with non-governmental representatives restricted to an advisory or consultative capacity. The ability of those occupying potentially differing philosophical or political positions, for instance, feminists, to exert meaningful influence over the final legislative shape, or even the policy process itself, is severely compromised within a hierarchically ordered structure such as this. A 'top down' ordering of the policy process in this way also introduces the risk of inappropriate and/or only partial co-option or adaptation of insights brought to the policy process by non-governmental participants. The bringing together within our legal and political systems of fundamentally different ways of constituting and understanding the social world cannot avoid creating intensified discursive tension unless this is paralleled by change in wider social power relations, for instance those constituted by gender inequality. In a lived material sense, for individuals attempting to create a sense of coherence and meaning to their experience, such tensions cannot help but produce even greater chaos as publicly focused legal/political discourse (albeit feminist flavored and/or inspired) comes into uneasy and potentially discordant contact with more traditional and still intensely private discourses of femininity, motherhood and matrimony.

Public/private

Thus, traditional abuse discourse remains closely entwined with traditional discourses of gender. The split between the public (male) world of work and the private (female) world of domesticity and the family, while closely scrutinized and criticized by feminists since the 1970s, has retained considerable traction, especially it would seem in relation to domestic violence. In fact, the notion that domestic violence is a distinctly private issue is an aspect of abuse discourse that seems especially resistant to change. A dramatic illustration of this can be seen in a media campaign around parenting which screened on

New Zealand television in recent years⁴². The television advertisement opens with the image of a small, clearly frightened girl, listening to a loud and unmistakably violent argument. A man then comes into shot, closes the window (thereby shutting out the abusive voices which the viewer now understands as coming from the house next door) and scooping up the child in a comforting embrace. While accomplishing its goal of demonstrating warm and nurturing fathering skills the advertisement also represents an extremely privatized image of domestic violence – where responsibility, both for the problem and solving it lies with the individuals concerned. Thus the ‘natural’ response to witnessing abuse becomes one of non-involvement, effectively legitimizing public reluctance to intervene in ‘private’ disputes between couples⁴³. The consequences attached to such understandings of gender and domestic violence were illustrated time and again in participants’ accounts. Many women offered stories of beatings meted out by partners in front of others, but few mentioned any form of intervention by these witnesses. Laura, Heather, Ruby and Julie all spoke of different situations where others witnessed their victimization and did not intervene.

I remember one time, cause he used to have a motorbike, and had the shed out the back and we were always in the shed tinkering with the motorbike and one day he turned on me outside and he had me on the ground and he had me by the hair each side and he was just belting my head on the concrete...on and on and on and I was just screaming and asking someone come and help me. And apparently they just got up and turned the telly up so they couldn't hear me. That's really ugly isn't it? Yeah, and they, the time I said that his mum couldn't wait to tell him that I'd told her to get lost or whatever, that day she stood there and watched him while he smacked me (Laura).

⁴² This campaign was run by Barnardos New Zealand, a national NGO focused upon parenting and childcare.

⁴³ More recently the ‘It’s not Okay’ social marketing campaign, a nation wide media campaign designed, conducted and funded by the Ministry of Social Development in conjunction and consultation with a wide range of NGOs has begun to present a far more public image of family violence. This campaign began some time after this project was completed and, while anecdotal reports suggest positive change, at this point there is little available research supporting and/or confirming this view.

We'd start arguing about it, and the next thing he'd be dragging me around the house by my clothes, just hitting me, and kicking me in the stomach. And the flatmate would just stand outside, and everyone reckons on the farm that they could hear me screaming. But no one ever got involved....I was always picking him up when he was drunk. You know, he'd ring me up at two in the morning – come pick me up. So I went and picked him up, and we started arguing. Like I told him, you know, I can't pick you up every morning, you know, I need my sleep too. And he booted my car door in and started dragging me up the street by my clothes, in front of all his mates (Heather).

I went to leave the nightclub. I thought if I don't get out of here I'm going to get chucked out, and just at the top of the stairs, he hit me, and I went down thirty or forty steps. Then when I got outside he gave me more. And there were lots of people around. No one ever stepped in. No one did anything. And I had blood pouring in all directions, I'd put my arm through a glass door too. But yeah, nobody worried (Ruby).

If I didn't do what he wanted me to do then it was bang, slap – right in front of his friends. Some of them saw me getting thrown around. We'd go out for a few drinks, you know, my mum would have our son, and I'm thrown from one end of the pub to the other (Julie).

Of course, not all men beat or abused their partners in front of witnesses, with many taking care to hide their violence and its consequences from the eyes and ears of others. Some women were only beaten within the confines of their home. Others only received blows or abuse to areas of their bodies normally hidden from the outside world. Still other men restricted abuse to purely verbal content in public, reserving their physical punishment for more private circumstances. However, the experiences of the women above highlight the destructive potential of particular strands of traditional discourses of gender and heterosexual coupledness. It seems that bystanders either accepted the rights of these men to discipline their women or, if not, did not feel that they had any

right/authority to intervene or comment. Alternately they may have been afraid that any intervention on their part would result in the violence turning on them. Whichever is the case, even though these demonstrate several distinctly opposed subject positions available to witnesses, the material consequences or results for the victims remained the same, illustrating the durability of notions that men have some right of control over women, particularly those with whom they have formed an intimate partnership.

Participants' understandings of 'abuse'

With the outline of the legal/political discourse sketched and the potential for chaos and discursive tension signaled, in returning to participants' stories, how did these women understand the meanings of abuse? How were the discourses constituting contemporary legal/political interventions evident within their stories and what other alternative or competing discourses were they also drawing from to make sense of their experience? What particular 'interpretive repertoires' were available to them to draw upon in creating their accounts? Did these provide women with a way to produce a sense of coherence and intelligibility around their experience?

Careful clarification of participant understandings of my chosen terminology was/is an important point to me given that I had deliberately chosen to use the word 'abuse', rather than other terms such as violence, battering or the like. As Mo Hume notes,

accounts of violence are moulded by hegemonic discourses within societies. The very recognition of an act as violent cannot be taken for granted (2007, p. 4).

I thought it only prudent then to allow for a more encompassing notion of violence, mainly provoked by a desire to avoid reduction of (serious) intimate partner violence to *only* physical abuse or beating. That this had been a sound decision was demonstrated to me by the comments of a number of participants who were anxious to highlight the particularly insidious nature of psychological, emotional and sexual abuse. Julie spoke strongly on this point in saying;

[he was] really aggressive...sexually as well, mentally, emotionally, the whole lot, in one. Well, you know, some say 'it's horrible getting beaten up' ... but it's worse with mental abuse because the scars are inside. And you know sometimes I wish that I could just get slapped around because it's better than mental abuse (Julie).

Physical battering is clearly an important issue. That said, to begin exploration with a hierarchally organized (and thus almost automatically prioritized) understanding of abuse unfortunately tends to sideline analysis (and even sometimes discussion) of psychological or emotional abuse, at the same time further solidifying understandings of abuse as somehow *equaling* bruises. What grows from this is that visible evidence of abuse, injuries, bruising and the like, come to be seen as clear warranting of the victim position, whereas psychological and/or emotional forms of abuse present far more ambiguous entitlement criteria. To take on the position of victim when one displays cuts and bruises is less challengeable, a more viable claim. This is far less so when one can speak only of having been verbally attacked and terrorized by threats of harm. However, given the sweepingly inclusive definitions provided in the legislation and initiatives outlined earlier, why was it that participants felt such a need to not only draw distinctions between physical and non-physical abuse, but also to so strongly emphasise the destructive harm caused by the non-physical? Why were they not entirely comfortable positioning themselves within the political/legal and clearly more sympathetic discourse, instead feeling a need almost to justify their claims? Which competing discourses of abuse were/are they drawing upon in these instances?

Central to this particular discussion then is conceptual language, especially the need to ensure that I and the women sharing their stories with me had at least roughly congruent understandings of what it was they were describing to me. So, back to the central questions of how these women understood and used the notion of abuse. A key point noted above is that the majority believed that for abuse to be 'real' it must include serious and ongoing physical assault and there must be clear evidence of abuse. Being unable to

present such concrete evidence presented difficulties for some women. As Miriam explained;

There was a lot of times that I actually wished he'd hit me - I actually wished that I'd had the black eyes, because he was very good when he hurt me....I didn't, I didn't get all the bruising and there was a lot of times I wished I did. It's really hard to tell someone else, people at Social Welfare it was at the time, I'm being abused....because I didn't have any real evidence of it. To tell, [caseworker], I am being abused, I am being sexually abused, do you understand? My stomach is absolutely, I'm in agony because I had to spend the last, you know, twenty-four hours holding on to urine. I'm in agony with that. My hair, my head's really sore 'cause I've been hauled around my house. I've been spat at. I feel like a big hunk of dirt. I'm being abused. But I didn't have any bruises (Miriam).

It would seem that the idea of 'abuse equaling bruises' has retained its position as a central component of abuse discourse, regardless of definitions provided by legal/political sources. In further illustration of this point, while recruiting participants for the research I fielded many telephone calls from women expressing great uncertainty as to whether their experience qualified them for the project (Ashcraft, 2000; Spender, 1985). Common to these conversations were comments along the lines of, 'well, it was more of a head thing really, he didn't actually hit me often', or, 'he didn't really beat me up, just pushed me around'. Selene's words illustrated this point most clearly when she told me that,

... I mean, he wasn't punching me or anything but just pushing and carrying on (Selene).

This is a point identified in much domestic violence research (Barnett, 2001; Ashcraft, 2000) and one reiterated on many occasions by participants in this project. Miriam, for instance, thought that she

hadn't been physically beaten enough - bruise-wise....because that is kind of like the mark for a lot of people. It's really hard to tell someone else, I'm being abused...because I didn't have any real evidence of it (Miriam).

It seems then that, for many women, to identify oneself as a victim of domestic violence, to take up the subject position of abuse victim, entails a need to have been physically beaten, and on a repeated and/or relatively frequent basis, and being able to provide incontrovertible, visible evidence of physical damage to the body. During the interview phase of the research, with few exceptions, the women discussed some version of the ideas outlined above. So why would this be the case? As already noted above, the official/legal discourses of abuse are clear in naming psychological and emotional abuse as violence. How then had these women come to understand that this was/is not always so straight forward? How had they come to understand that, despite official/legal claims to the contrary, being psychologically or emotionally terrorized did not warrant equivalent rights to support and protection? A closer inspection of the policies and practices of the various agencies seen as central players in today's violence prevention sphere enables us to begin teasing out a possible explanation.

Statutory agencies: Police, courts, legislation and the judiciary

This exploration will begin with the New Zealand police force, primarily because this is arguably the state agency most closely concerned with the day to day task of putting into practice the legislation criminalizing intimate partner abuse. Do police practices support the equation of abuse and bruising, and if so, how? What particular subject positions are or can be enabled by such practices? And, conversely, what positioning may be constrained? In the case of this arm of the state, the official policies within which police operate provide a sweeping and inclusive definition of abuse, and include provision to arrest (and detain in custody for up to 24 hours) for any breach of a protection order⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ At this point in time (March 2009) there is legislation currently before the New Zealand Parliament which will provide Police with the power to issue temporary Orders of Protection at the time they attend family violence incidents. If passed into law, this move will not replace existing Protection Orders or the

Despite this the standards of evidence that police require to pursue an arrest have not changed, and physical evidence is prioritized. In many cases police handling of abuse complaints is still seen as inconsistent (Barwick *et al*, 2000, Robertson & Busch *et al*, 2007), especially in relation to non-physical abuse. One section of the Police website makes this explicit in noting that ‘if you are in immediate danger: call the Police. They will respond immediately. If the danger is not immediate, there are other organisations that can help you arrange a Protection Order’ – clearly indicating to victims the lack of importance accorded to non-physical abuse.

Credibility/believability

While an issue perhaps merely reflective of questions of resourcing and a need to prioritise service provision, the implications of such prioritisation must be acknowledged. In this situation, women become *de facto* risk assessors, forced into the position of judging their degree of imminent risk, of deciding on the potential of escalation or even lethality, and even of making the decision as to whether their experience ‘counts’ as abuse. Previous experience of relatively insignificant incidents exploding into violent assaults may have taught them that such escalation is possible, even probable. However, because they can offer no distinct evidence of ‘immediate danger’, other than an intuitive ‘knowing’, they may be reluctant to call for Police help because, as Penny explains, they may fear that their risk assessment (which they may themselves doubt or distrust) might not be believed or taken seriously.

Never got the cops ‘cause guess I wasn’t sure what to say really ‘cause most times it wasn’t that awful, just yelling and frightening. But I didn’t know when it was going to get bad so sometimes I could have rung the cops but then I’d have looked pretty silly if they didn’t think it was bad you know? I mean would you believe some of that stuff?....A couple of fights started as we were actually driving in the car. And one argument, I had the baby in my arms, I had the baby in my

ways in which these are issued and/or enforced but will allow Police to provide a level of legal protection to victims and their families that has not previously been available.

arms, and the baby was probably three or four months, we were having an argument. And he said "You'd better shut your mouth, or we're going over that bridge!" And I didn't, I thought – We can't! But we did. He drove us off this bridge.... That time he drove us off the bridge, well, when you think about it and I have, no one would have believed me even if I had of told them. There's no way someone would purposely drive off a bridge. Would you? No, no, I never told them (Penny).

Penny's account demonstrates an issue many victims of abuse confront in trying to gain acceptance and belief when they speak of their experiences. Most can point to 'evidence' of abusive incidents which are relatively easily verified. In this instance there is absolutely no doubt that something, an event, occurred. The car *did* go off the bridge. Her partner *was* driving. Neither of these points is at issue; both are completely credible and easily confirmed. What is less easily validated and/or believed, something that Penny clearly recognizes, is *her interpretation* of why and how it happened. It takes no stretch of belief or imagination to understand the event; accidents do happen of course. However, it is difficult enough to convince others that someone would deliberately and purposefully drive a vehicle off a bridge at speed. To *then* suggest that this was done for no other reason than to terrify their partner strains the bounds of credibility almost beyond belief.

Other women, struggling with understanding their experience of feeling controlled, powerless and vaguely threatened within their relationships also hesitated to access help and support, wondering instead whether what was going on really was only 'in their heads', as many of their abusers had claimed, both to them and others. Sandy describes below an incident illustrating how her husband, and her own beliefs around the likely judgments of others, worked to cast doubt on her sanity and isolate her from potential support.

He knocked me around. That's when I was outside, and he rushed off to get the neighbours because he tried to make out that I was mental and I was going to

commit suicide and all that....I came back into the house and he had disappeared off, and then of course the neighbour arrived and I suppose that he would have hoped that I was gone and they would have had to look for me. And of course that would have confirmed the fact that I was quite imbalanced. If I was spending nights away, because I mean what person does?....Because quite often when he got really bad, I would spend the night away from the house, I always had a sleeping bag stashed in the horse covers. And I used to stay in the middle of the paddock. I couldn't stay in a shed, like a hay-shed or wool shed, because he'd go looking for me. And one time he went with a gun. And that gave me a real fright, so from then on I never went into a building (Sandy).

Penny and Sandy's words highlight an especially pernicious and dangerous aspect of many women's experiences of living thorough violence. Their accounts demonstrate that they both knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that their lives were in danger. Yet given that even *they* had such difficulty comprehending the reality of these events, the fear of others' disbelief was very real (and almost reasonable) to them. For these women, their understandings of what constituted credible actions, of what was sane/insane, believable/unbelievable, reasonable/unreasonable, credible and so on exacerbated their dilemma. Penny refused to chance disbelief, trading off the very real risk of physical harm against avoidance of the emotionally painful consequences of having her account dismissed or discounted. Sandy's strategy of hiding out on the farm through the night seems entirely reasonable in the context of being hunted by an armed and angry man, yet she doubted that it would be seen as such by others. For her, disclosure and potential disbelief thus carried with it the risk of the intensified stigma of being positioned as mentally ill.

Many women reported numerous threats against them, their children and/or their pets, but generally were not confident that these would be considered a concern by the Police. For most women, being terrorized by ongoing verbal, emotional or psychological abuse of this sort was simply not regarded as adequate reason to seek Police help. This was

paralleled again by uncertainty and fear that they could be disbelieved by police if their abuser challenged their version of events, a fear illustrated by Nancy's account.

We were always told, don't think you can ever bring the Police into this house because if you do that'll be the end of your lives. And I think that my daughter really felt that that was as extreme, that, as it, where it was going if she did bring the cops back in that she wouldn't live that day, or the rest of that day. I think at the time if I'd thought seriously about it I would have bought the cops in right there and then. Because, one, I had a witness, who saw it all happen and the reasons it went down but she was very free with her hands. She had the gift of the gab and could really turn a situation around that, that I had made her do it (Nancy).

It is clear from the above excerpt that Nancy's interactions with her abuser increased her feelings of fear, uncertainty and isolation, thus solidly buttressing her victimization. Also evident here is the power and popularity of ideas around the constitution of blame, especially those used to explain the ways in which victims either cause or precipitate their victimization. Most of the women's accounts were similar in this respect, providing story after story of how their abusers used threats and emotional or psychological manipulation *and* victims fears around responsibility and credibility, to gain and/or reinforce their control. Equally as important for this project though is how these emotional responses and/or understandings were reinforced and solidified by their interactions with *others*, especially those others occupying helping or support positions in their lives.

Allocation of blame

Demonstration of these processes is best achieved through a careful reading of the ways in which women recounted their experiences of specific interactions with their abusers, families and helping agencies. As an initial starting point, I offer excerpts from Selene's story which describe various instances of contact with, firstly, the local Police, and then her concerned neighbours. To preface this though, the next excerpt is included to place

these incidents in context, to provide at least a vague sense of the everyday reality of Selene's experience of life with a violently abusive man.

I just sort of remember, you know, sitting there at night time and then he's, you know, trying to...create a atmosphere, you know, like he was saying oh, he's going to commit suicide, so he'd take a knife and, and it was all talk.... The threat to, you know, to take a knife to his throat in the shower. I remember like he was always threatening to kill my dog and you know, he'd kick the door in, you know. You know, with his driving, he'd drive erratic. You know, there was so many times we'd just about have a, you know, close shave....He was always trying to burn me with his smokes or I remember one time he tried, he set fire, you know, got all this paper on the lino and set fire to it....He was into martial arts, so he had all these sticks and things, yeah, that he used [during assaults] (Selene).

Selene lived with her abusive husband for around nine years, during which time she attempted to leave on a number of occasions. Until this particular night though, she had managed to conceal the violence from all except immediate family, relying upon support from her parents and assistance from her husband's parents when his behaviour became most dangerous. She didn't want others knowing about the

mess that I was involved with...didn't want people to feel sorry for me, you know, because of being in that situation.... I mean, you don't tell just tell anybody about your problems do you? (Selene).

On this night however the decision about who to call for help was taken out of her hands.

He came home late and, I can't really remember how the argument happened but, yeah, we had a fight, and I was screaming and at the time the neighbours' boys were camping out in their back yard and they were a bit concerned about me screaming so they rang the Police. So then the Police got involved and that was it. That's the final straw for me, yeah. Having the Police involved. And he was taken

away. They asked me what to do with him and I said, 'oh, take him to his parents'. So they took him to his parents.... I mean, I was quite distressed and the Police said, 'well, what do you want me to do with him?' You know, what do you think? You know, and of course you're sort of emotional. I didn't want him to get locked up. But you know, thinking back now, what a silly question to ask me. What I should do with, you know, where they should take him, you know....The Police, I remember this arsehole of a Policeman said to me, 'oh, I don't want to come back to this house again' (Selene).

Apportioning of responsibility is clear in this instance. Selene, the victim, rather than her husband, the abuser, is cautioned against any future need for the police to return to her home. Selene, not the attending Police officer, is expected to decide 'what to do' with the offender. The underlying messages conveyed within this particular interaction, while presumably (hopefully) unintentional, nonetheless provide implicit support to notions of victim complicity and/or blame for their victimization (e.g. McDermott & Garafalo, 2004). It is Selene who is to somehow deal with any future violence. By implication, it is Selene who should have dealt with this episode. It is Selene who will be at fault, should the Police be called to return and, again by implication, it is Selene who is at fault for the current incident. It is Selene's responsibility to choose both whether and how to punish her abuser (Berns, 2004; Loseke, 2003). Even in ideal circumstances, without the chaos and emotional turmoil surrounding a violent assault, the implications of the words and actions of the Police in this instance would be unmistakable. Whatever the provisions of the legislation or the power of the law, the prevailing discourse at work here is one grounded in assumptions of individual rather than community responsibility, in particular women's responsibility for relationship maintenance and caretaking. So, while effective insofar as the offender was eventually removed, this particular interaction with the Police was far less useful in terms of supporting efforts to allocate responsibility for the abuse in its rightful place – with the perpetrator rather than the victim.

What then of shape and content of Selene's subsequent contact with the concerned neighbours who had stepped in and called the Police? Where was responsibility for the

violence located within that particular set of interactions? Sadly it does not require an especially close reading of Selene's account to answer this query. Her words offer a startlingly clear illustration of another intensely damaging facet of abuse discourse; the pathological argument that women, for a variety of reasons embedded deeply within their unconscious psyche, are attracted to and actively seek out (a succession of) abusive partners. While slightly different to the victim blaming effects discussed in the section above, this discursive strategy serves equally as effectively to again displace responsibility. For this concerned couple there was no doubt where responsibility for the actual abuse lay. Unfortunately, potentially empowering knowledge then twists into yet another abusive weapon as they express their belief that Selene must get to grips with why she let herself become involved in such a situation to begin with! Implicit within this belief is the notion that she somehow 'allowed', even encouraged, the abuse.

I was tired, exhausted. You know, all this constant emotional abuse, I think came to a head. The neighbors, the boys who rang the Police, it surprised me. It just came from nowhere and I was like, I don't want that....I think they think that you're quite vulnerable, you know, and feel that you need, you know. I mean, they've got their heart in the right place, but it wasn't for me, yeah. And I had, you know, I had the man next door, I mean, and he was very good and that and his wife was very good. Like they said to me, you know, 'you've really got to get to the bottom of why you're attracted to people like my ex-husband' and yeah.....I guess, they, I wondered if they were scared I would repeat the same process with going with someone else. I'm not sure. But I remember, his wife said to me, 'you've really to think about, you know, why you're attracted, yeah, to that kind of person'. I mean, I never went out with a person like that. The person who I went out with wasn't a violent person...initially (Selene).

As Selene insists though, her husband had *not* been violent at the beginning of their marriage. She had *not* been attracted to a violent dangerous man. The violence had begun some time after they were married. Unfortunately, these comments, well meaning or not, did little to ease her anxiety that she was indeed somehow responsible for the violence

within her relationship. What they also do is demonstrate the durability of some of the myths surrounding domestic violence, for instance the idea that some women are repeatedly attracted to abusive men because they are either masochistic and enjoy violence, or have a (natural feminine) desire to be controlled and dominated by a man. Also illustrated is a biologically determinist understanding notion around the basis or causes of intimate partner violence. From the neighbours reading, Selene's husband is perhaps pathologically unwell, or 'a violent man', or abnormal and deviant, rather than a man employing abuse and violence, within a context of patriarchally ordered social power relations to gain and maintain his dominance and control of another human being.

Blame, responsibility and the problem of 'evidence'

Selene was one participant who had little difficulty naming her husband's behaviour as abusive. Although he routinely used emotional blackmail through suicide threats and so on, he also physically abused her on a regular basis thus defusing any potential ambiguity and enabling her to more comfortably/legitimately take on the position of victim.

However, as has been signaled earlier, the situation was not as clear cut for those women suffering mainly non-physical abuse. These women often hesitated to name their experience and access help despite official/legal discourse supporting their positioning as victims. While participants did not offer any clear reason for their hesitancy, a partial explanation can perhaps be seen in concerns expressed by some researchers around the day-to-day implementation of the DVA 1995. An early evaluation of the Act noted that obtaining police action in instances of psychological abuse was still problematic, with "police being only willing to act where there is serious physical violence" (Barwick *et al*, 2000, p.87). A more recent and equally critical examination reported similar findings (Robertson & Busch *et al*, 2007). Police respondents in the earlier study attributed this in part to the difficulties involved in attempting to ascertain the veracity or otherwise of complaints of other than physical abuse, particularly given the standard of evidence which legal institutions require to establish veracity, thus demonstrating the pivotal role of the subjective interpretations and decisions of individual officers. Simply put, if an investigating officer lacks understanding of non-physical abuse (or sympathy/empathy

for its victims), in effect considers it as less serious or damaging and/or can't 'see' the necessary evidence, the chance of effective intervention is minimal at best, whatever official provisions are set out in the Act. Such an issue strongly highlights the durability of the 'abuse = bruises' strand of abuse discourse – a troubling problem in itself, but one with exponentially multiplied implications if attached to those charged with front-line implementation of the legislation.

But what then are these implications? What were/are the consequences for women in need of police intervention but lacking visible evidence of abuse? Many participants resisted seeking help from police because of their understandings of exactly what constituted abuse. For instance, police would not be called unless the abuse was physical and 'serious'. Sometimes though, even serious injury wasn't enough. As Rachel, a woman who had suffered repeated injuries, including burns severe enough to receive hospital treatment, notes,

I just, I never saw it being so bad that I needed the Police...even though it was really bad (Rachael).

Linda, a victim of sustained psychological abuse, offered the following account. Regardless of family support, Linda remained uncertain as to whether her husband's actions constituted abuse and still expressed the suspicion that she was ultimately responsible for his behavior anyway!

I told her [sister] I've been thrown out of bed again because our bedroom, we were on a deck and there was a door and he'd throw them [bedclothes] out onto the deck. Or the duvet, he'd take them into the lounge, so there was a door onto the deck and I couldn't get them, I couldn't get, either way. There was a dead lock on there, on the deck, and I couldn't, I couldn't get to them. He'd chuck them outside. Lock the door. Or take them with him into the lounge so I used to sort of get in his wardrobe, put his coat on or something like that and lie in bed but I was a fool. I was stupid. And she said, right, we're going to the Police. So we went to

the Police. The Police said, you need a solicitor, but, here again, because I wouldn't have, well, what is it when I wouldn't have him charged. I kept thinking it was me. It was me that was, it was my problem (Linda).

It seems Linda's sister had little difficulty labeling this behaviour as abusive. However, subsequent interactions with police, especially those following Linda's reluctance to lay charges against her husband, severely undermined any potentially positive effects of her sister's support. These interactions served to reinforce her sense that she was at fault, both for somehow creating her own victimization and then not taking action to end it (Berns, 2004). Linda's assumption of responsibility remained unchallenged, as did her sense of self-blame. The placing of blame, either implicitly or explicitly, by self or others, is a particularly corrosive and shame generating aspect of discourses of abuse. In the first instance, victims experience a shameful failure simply by becoming victims, but may then be further shamed if they fail to stop the abuse and therefore bar themselves from repositioning outside of this stigmatized identity.

Although blame placing is undoubtedly constituted in multiple separate but interrelated ways, participants' accounts were presented in terms of action or inaction on their part (rather than those of their abuser), reflected in comments such as 'I should have...', 'could have...', 'shouldn't have...' and so on, thus constituting themselves as equally (if not more) responsible for the abuse they experienced. Unfortunately, this shame/blame placing is implicitly supported by many helping agencies, largely through the language chosen for use in educational or promotional resources, but also through the actions (or inactions) of individuals working within these organisations. It is most clearly illustrated in the use of language around choice and freedom in advice to abused women – 'you don't *have* to live like this', 'you *can* leave', 'there is help available'. All of these, while probably selected as terms offering empowerment to victims, also operate to engender a sense of weakness (and a perceived lack of personal agency) on the part of victims who for whatever reason are unable or unwilling to access the support on offer (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Loseke, 2003; Dunn, 2004 & 2005), thus creating a sense of shame and self-blame. Self-blaming comments such as 'I should have looked for help', 'I should

have left him', or so on become a likely response, as illustrated above in Linda's assessment that she was "stupid...that it was her problem."

Many participants noted the idea that they must have, in some way, deserved or been complicit in their abuse - because they could/should have; changed (themselves or their behavior); not ignored early episodes; addressed the issue earlier; sought help; terminated the relationship sooner and so on. Lynette, for instance, said

I think, how did I put up with him for so long? I should have, you know... Why did I even marry him in the first place? But, anyway, you have to go through these life experiences and try these things...if you're stupid enough (Lynette).

Evidence of implicit support of blame placing of this type can be found in a range of unlikely places. For instance, the New Zealand Police website contains a section offering advice to abuse victims. It explains the assistance available once 'you decide you want to make the violence stop'. A pamphlet produced by the Department for Courts offers similar advice to 'help people stand up to domestic violence and try to make it stop'. This pamphlet also uses the language of choice in noting that the first step is 'deciding to act', going on to explain that,

It takes courage to stand up to domestic violence, but it's important to remember that everyone is better off when violence stops. This includes you, your children if you have any, anyone else who lives with you, and even the person abusing you.

All good sound advice it is true, but also advice locating the responsibility for dealing with the abuse primarily with victims who, in light of the confusion and chaos constituting their day-to-day lives, may be in no position to take up the courageous proactive subject positioning seemingly required to access these support services.

Legislation and the Courts

The statutory requirements of the DVA are also somewhat problematic in respect of non-physical abuse, despite the Act's inclusive definition of what counts as domestic violence. As mentioned earlier, central to the Act is the Protection Order, a protective order issued by the Family Court which enables police to respond more effectively to domestic disputes. To obtain a protection order the applicant must supply to the court a detailed affidavit setting out the history of abuse underpinning the application. These are routinely granted in cases of physical abuse, even in relation to single incidents of violence, especially if supported by evidence of physical injury. Such orders are also frequently made 'without notice' – meaning that a temporary order is granted immediately by the court, purely on the basis of the applicant's affidavit, with no prior notification to the alleged perpetrator (Barwick *et al*, 2000). These temporary orders are open to challenge at a later court hearing but come into effect – in relation to police ability to enforce, once signed off by the presiding judge. In the case of psychological or emotional abuse however, a carefully detailed account of sustained and ongoing abuse is required with orders unable to rest on single or isolated incidents (unless part of an incident of physical assault). Orders for psychological and/or emotional abuse are also less often made without notice – many granted only following a full hearing of the application and with no protection to applicants in the interim period. Differential treatment of this kind implicitly upholds an abuse hierarchy and clearly demonstrates to victims that non-physical abuse is less important, serious or damaging – and signals the potentially challengeable nature of their accounts.

The Courts (in terms of their ability to grant Trespass and Protection Orders) were seen in a similar light by participants. Women were sometimes reluctant to provide a detailed account of what they felt to be shameful events to lawyers and court personnel.

It was really stupid, cause when I went, when I finally did leave, I mean, I had all this, all the battle scars on my face, 'cause that's what they, I mean, people around then were saying to me, 'get in and see a solicitor right now, you know,

don't waste your time. Now you look so vulnerable, get in there and do it'. And I went in there and I hid in a corner in reception 'cause I didn't want anyone to see me and then when I went to see the solicitor I basically said what I, you know, that I wanted, that he, he'd been beating me up and stuff. And he said, 'oh, if you give me 10 pages like this, you know foolscap pages, 10 of these on what he's done to you, we can take it to court'. And I thought, you know, I just didn't want to regurgitate 10 pages worth of what had happened to me over the previous 9 years (Laura).

In yet another illustration of what was by now an easily discerned theme running through their accounts, there were participants who felt their claims would not be believed by the court, or that they would be seen as at fault. In some cases this belief was even confirmed by their experience with the court system as is so graphically shown in this excerpt from Julie describing her interaction with the legal system during attempts to gain custody of her children.

The courts made me go back, knowing how much of a nervous wreck I was around him. I felt like they were tormenting me by sending me back. I had to prove that he was... to prove that there was no reconciliation. They wanted me to reconcile over all that, all those years of abuse. And I started crying. I was yelling. I was angry. I said 'you don't even know what you fools are doing. He's been in and out of prison, he's abused me violently and you're making me...you're sending me back to him?!' They said 'well, you know, you've got your [protection] order out you'll be safe with that'. I said 'he doesn't give a damn about that!' But there was nothing I could do. The lawyer had to take me out and tell me that I had to be calm and that. So I had to go back in there and be calm as anything, and agree and go along with them (Julie).

In this instance Julie has done what she believed she needed to do to protect herself and her children by leaving her husband. She has followed recommended practice by obtaining a protection order and was attempting to put legal custody arrangements in

place. Yet still she found herself unable to escape her husband's control, this time supported by the court, and her lawyer!

Images emerging

What this account provides is another graphic contribution to a gradually emerging understanding of what it means to be a victim of abuse and how one 'should/must' go about doing this particular subject position, an outline of what sort of woman and/or partner can 'be' a legitimate victim. By sifting through the women's accounts we can begin to see the ways in which they were expected and/or required to act and feel and what expectations they could reasonably hold of others. Indeed this may well be an appropriate time to begin pulling together some of the threads of subjectivity signaled throughout the sections above. What has been becoming increasingly more apparent is that there are distinct ways of 'being' a victim of abuse but that these shade subtly according to a virtually infinite range of criteria and contexts. Just as apparent too are the sanctions (actual or imagined) which these women saw as accompanying any failure to act and feel as one 'should' if involved in an abusive intimate relationship. These requirements were amorphous, most often unspoken, tended to shift rapidly and sharply depending upon contextual factors and thus presented an incredibly jumbled, chaotic and often irreconcilable selection of subject position 'choices' for victims of partner abuse.

One of the first facets to emerge was that of victims as somehow being deserving of punishment, that women who were beaten were seemingly in transgression of 'rules' around appropriate levels of obedience and/or deference to their abusers and were therefore at fault. This was an explicit part of most participants experience as their partners informed them repeatedly that the abuse was their own fault; that if they could only 'be' different/better, act differently/better, think or feel differently/better, there would be no need for punishment. As Lynette's husband frequently said, just "take a look at yourself, a long look at yourself." This, of course, is nothing new with most accounts of partner violence including reference to the notion of victim blaming by perpetrators. However, some of the women's accounts of interactions with others during abusive

incidents illustrated a tacit/implicit, and perhaps more insidious, form of victim blaming, as witnesses stood by and allowed violent assaults to continue or explicitly blamed them for what was being done to them. Angie's dad, when told she'd ended the relationship said to her, "well, if you weren't such a bitch to live with he wouldn't have left you" So, especially for those women, they, as victims, were seemingly considered by others as troublesome or difficult, arguably failing to properly or appropriately live up to the requirements of heterosexual coupledness. In short, therefore, one important part of the makeup of their position as abuse victims was one of failure and/or inadequacy, something stated explicitly by their abusers and carried implicitly in the actions, or inactions of others.

Ironically, other participants though would have considered these publicly beaten women almost fortunate. For them, a key strand of positioning as a legitimate victim of abuse relied upon being able to provide or demonstrate unequivocal evidence of battering. To attempt to take up the position without such evidence robbed their claims of legitimacy. As observed by Miriam, injuries or bruising provided "credibility in the abuse world", largely unquestioned warranting of one's position as a victim and automatic legitimization of appeals for support or assistance. She outlined instances during which she attempted to communicate her distress to others, only to have her experience discounted or disbelieved, simply because she could not display bodily damage. This need to offer visible evidence was a point of immense conflict for some women, especially in relation to their day-to-day interactions with others. Because they knew only too well the stigma of such bodily damage (Leisenring, 2006), they went to great lengths to either hide the bruising or explain it away as the result of an innocuous accident, thus protecting themselves from shame but, again ironically, also ruling out the opportunity to justify any claims for help or support. For some women then another conflicted, but important aspect of their victim positioning revolved around physical injury.

Quite apart from these more tangible aspects though, the women also demonstrated a range of less easily discernible, but equally conflicted aspects of their positioning. Central to these were issues and questions around their capability (or lack of capability) as

responsible agentic individuals (Berns, 2004, Dunn, 2004, Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007, Loseke, 2003, and Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The multiple discourses which swirl around this notion of responsibility created discomforting levels of tension for participants. In non-abusive circumstances, the achievement of the feminist movement in enabling a subject position for women as rational, capable and responsible adults, rather than irrational, emotional and childlike has been extremely positive. However, within the context of an abusive intimate relationship these discursive elements can become incredibly chaotic. Women may find themselves constituted as having rationally chosen abusive partners, as capable of having chosen not to call for help, as having chosen not to leave their abuser, as having made an active decision to live with abuse and so on. As a result of their interactions with others, many women even come to understand themselves and their actions/inactions through this particular discursive framing. Selene's account of the intervention of helpful neighbours provides an excellent example of the way in which this can happen. Whatever their intentions, the comments of these neighbours around Selene's 'choice' of a violent abusive man, demonstrated to her that part of her positioning as a victim of abuse was to bear the responsibility for attracting/inviting abuse into her life. As noted above, many of the resources available to victims of intimate partner violence emphasise this focus upon personal responsibility by a framing of options and possibilities in a language of choice and rational decision making. Other women adopted this discourse of responsibility and rationality in order to take on blame, describing themselves as foolish, silly or even stupid for having 'allowed' themselves to end up in an abusive relationship, communicating clearly that this simply wouldn't happen to strong, independent or 'on to it' women. So, another discursive feature of a victim position for some women was that of weakness, a failure to live up to contemporary notions of women as self-sufficient, self-determining and so on.

Many women, despite feeling discomforted by the sense of failure and weakness attached to victimization found themselves forced into positioning themselves (or being positioned by others) as such in order to legitimize appeals for help or support. In order to take on a victim position it was sometimes necessary to present themselves as incapable of autonomous action, as needing the care and protection of others (Dunn, 2004 & 2005,

Loseke, 2003). In short, were forced to present themselves as weak and/or dependant. Paula, for instance talked of conversations she had with her father after escaping her violent partner. She knew that her parents had been aware of the violence in her relationship and had often wondered why they, particularly her father, had not intervened. She recalls,

so then I had this argument with Dad about why don't you step in? And tell [partner] to lay off. He still wouldn't. He wanted me to come to him, and ask him for help (Paula).

In this instance, to access her father's protection Penny was required to position herself as a helpless victim virtually pleading for help. Many women (including Penny), were hugely reluctant to take this path because of the stigma they understood to be attached to notions of helplessness, weakness and need (Lamb, 1996, Leisenring, 2006). As Lorraine puts it,

what the hell do you want to be a victim for? Do you really want people walking around saying - oh poor Lorraine, isn't it sad, she got beaten up by her husband, isn't that tragic. I mean, get a grip (Lorraine).

The discussion above highlights the intensely conflicted character of the subject position(s) available to victims of intimate partner violence. The way in which they and others interpret and/or constitute their actions is hugely dependant upon specific context. What will seem irrational, or even indicative of insanity from one particular standpoint, becomes entirely rational and sane from another. What appears as irrationality in a non-abusive context shifts to clearly sensible and rational in abusive circumstances, as Sandy's account of hiding out on the farm overnight illustrates. In other instances, women found themselves having to take up, or being assigned, positions of childlike dependency and weakness in order to access support and protection, yet were simultaneously expected to adopt positions of strength and responsibility in their interactions with others, as demonstrated by Selene's story. Some women found

themselves constituted as responsible for their victimization, either for choosing an abusive relationship or failing to leave. In short, the subject positioning described above is most easily characterized in terms of virtually inevitable failure and inadequacy. In the context of an abusive relationship, achievement or success on the one hand seems to sit evenly balanced with matching failure on the other, entirely dependent upon which particular discursive strands are being drawn upon and how these are woven together.

Community agencies

Even community agencies with their heritage rooted firmly in 1970s radical feminist activism provide support, albeit unintentionally, for some problematic aspects of the constitution of victim positioning, especially in relation to the abuse equals physical assault equation. What this demonstrates most clearly is the sometimes yawning gap between rhetoric and policy and organizational grassroots practice. At a national level, the linkage between abuse and bruises is explicitly illustrated in several recent fundraising campaigns by a leading domestic violence NGO, Women's Refuge. The 2002 campaign, for instance, opened with a media exercise centering on a number of professional women in several main centers 'made-up' to present the appearance of having been battered. This opening was backed up with an extensive week-long print and television media campaign, again featuring women with severe bruising and other physical injuries. Clearly of course, this was purely a media exercise, designed in a visually dramatic fashion to capture public attention, sympathy and donations. As such, it cannot (and must not) be seen as reflective of the encompassing definition of abuse underpinning the work of Women's Refuge. But, for the wider public, those outside the organisation, including potential clients, the picture presented was clear; being abused equates with battery and bruises. While other forms of abuse were not overtly minimized, this was, in effect, an implicit feature of the campaign⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ This form of campaigning has fortunately been put aside in more recent times with a move to a more subtle presentation of intimate partner violence which avoids prioritisation of any one form of abuse.

Similarly, this particular campaign extensively utilized a survivor story⁴⁶. The author, Kelly, was a guest on a national television show and her story featured prominently in several newspaper articles. As with the advertising campaign, while her story did not directly aim to minimise the psychological and emotional elements of her experience of abuse, these were far over-shadowed by details of sustained physical and sexual sadism and violence at the hands of her partner. Again, while using this story in no way reflects Refuge philosophy, its use in such a high-profile way inevitably served to again emphasize stereotypical images of abuse.

Agency practice(s)

Day-to-day interaction between Refuge staff and clients, most specifically in relation to the handling of crisis calls, also tends to reinforce the importance of physical violence. Those staffing crisis lines are trained to inquire as to the level of imminent danger at the time of the call – asking the caller whether they are ‘safe’. This practice is virtually unavoidable given sometimes serious resource constraints, for instance, limited staff availability and/or safe house space. In effect, however, what this also means is that those callers experiencing non-physical abuse are given less comprehensive access to Refuge facilities and services. This normally takes the form of community-based support and counseling, rather than the residential care and support provided to victims of physical battering. While a purely pragmatic decision around allocation of scarce resources, this operational practice has the inevitable result of cementing in place once again a clear hierarchy of abuse and, by extension, serves to undermine Refuge’s efforts to establish psychological and emotional abuse as seriously abusive in their own right

Consequences of Women’s Refuge policy and practices

Participants' attitudes towards Women's Refuge were also illustrative of dominant discourses of abuse and victimhood and the way these can yet again block access to another potential avenue of assistance. Firstly, Refuge was, like the Police, seen as

⁴⁶ This story is included in Hann, S. (2001) Palmerston North Women’s Refuge Herstory, 1979-2001.

working with 'real' victims of domestic violence. In the main this seemed to consist of a picture of economically disadvantaged women, probably with dependant children, exhibiting signs of serious assault, perhaps running from gang affiliations, and with little, if any access to other resources or support. This was illustrated by comments indicating that many participants didn't feel Refuge was for 'women like me', or was for women who were 'really bashed'. Recall for instance Anita's comments earlier describing gang member's girlfriends as 'scum'. Janine was another quite explicit in her explanation of why Refuge wasn't an option she had seriously considered, sentiments echoed by Debra.

No. I don't...I guess it didn't sound like it was for me. I'd only ever heard pretty grotty stuff about Refuge...you know, like about the people who go there. In (provincial city) it was this old, old house and it was sort of for, I don't know, but not people like me...like if you were really poor or something. I know, like...I saw it on TV one time...and stuff about how the Mongrel Mob women go there and it just didn't sound like me (Janine).

Middle-class women, like myself probably get as beaten as more lower class people are. That's probably sounding terrible. There's just not - I don't know - Refuge always sounds like - someone like me who has the car and the pay packet, it would never occur to me to go to a Refuge (Debra).

Therefore, unless participants felt they fitted a stereotypical and highly stigmatized 'battered woman' image - an image most worked extremely hard to avoid, they effectively barred themselves from access to most support agencies, governmental and non-governmental. As all of the discussion above demonstrates, the ways in which participants described their experience were underpinned by many solidly debunked yet still prevalent images of abuse victims. Most of their stories were illustrative of a specific form of abuse discourse – a version clearly attaching blame for the abuse to the victim rather than her abuser and locating the issue as personal and individual, rather than a collective social problem. Also notable within this particular discursive constitution of victimhood is its tendency to be framed around notions of individual failure and

inadequacy. Women living through abuse are constituted as failing to measure up to dominant understandings of how to 'properly' be or do the interrelated subjectivities of 'woman' and 'abuse victim', thus adding a distinctly shamed and shaming character to their positioning. However, this shaming is further intensified and compounded as abused women are also seen as failing to successfully achieve within the confines of dominant understandings of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood.

Chapter seven:

Discourse(s) of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony & motherhood

Heterosexual coupledness & matrimony

The preceding section explored the ways participants' knowledges of 'abuse' and 'abuse victims' influenced the possibilities available to them as they constituted their experiences of living through violence. Coming through most strongly in these accounts was a sense of restriction and constraint around how they were able to understand and describe their lives, a constraint closely linked to the feelings of shame and stigma they saw attached to particular subject positions, especially that of 'abuse victim'. Also discussed above were the ways the shame and stigma surrounding intimate partner abuse received support, albeit unintentionally, through the policies and practices of a range of governmental and non-governmental intervention agencies. Despite the powerful influence exerted in this way though, such dominant discourses of abuse and victimization comprised only a portion of the discursive resources drawn upon by participants. Also vitally important in shaping their experience were their understandings, knowledges and expectations of themselves, their partners and their relationships that were made available through a range of other powerful discourses at work in their lives, most notably, discourses of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood.

The shaming processes noted in the earlier section were seen to be further intensified and compounded as participants recognised their 'failure' to successfully achieve within the confines of dominant understandings of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood. In addition to the ways they used dominant discourse(s) of abuse in constituting their experiences, many of the women also talked about the knowledge of heterosexual coupledness which they brought to their relationships, noting how this worked to shape their everyday experiences of living through abuse. Although more highly contested in contemporary times, the notion of heterosexual coupledness as the

norm persists (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). As Julie's story of meeting and marrying her abuser suggests, some of these initial understandings were intensely traditional, blending highly specific ways of being and doing heterosexual coupledness and matrimony.

I was 15, very naïve. I think a typical young girl - wants the boyfriend, the white picket fence, the family, you know? The nice car – everything that goes with being a mother and a housewife I think. Just with the wrong one! The first night I met him, he punched me then. After my first child, my first son, which I'd planned to have, thinking that that might settle him, that this might make a happy family. So after our first son was born, we got a new home and we worked and we had it all. I had it all. I had my picket fence – but it wasn't white – had a new car, a new lovely Lockwood home which I'd always wanted and our son. But the abuse got worse....So it progressed slowly. It sort of was a shove, a push, a slap, and he came from a lot of violence, himself, so he honed that violence in. He thought that was love. 'Cause he saw his step-parents doing the same – his father hitting. And I thought – God, I'm not going through that! But over the years it just progressed. And it was worse – black eyes, I lost my teeth – top set. It was just slowly, breaking my teeth, threatening my family, so I was not to leave. If I left he'd burn the house down with my family in it. There's just so much – I was nearly drowned several times, rifle to my head several times (Julie).

For Julie then, the anticipated content of life as a participant in these institutions was clear. The notion of 'wife' she brought to her experience was one of happiness and shared material possessions, along with, it seemed, virtually automatic entry to the world of motherhood. The shared understandings of the benefits of heterosexual coupledness were equally clearly demonstrated in the stories of many other participants. Liz for instance believed that her partner would

love me and I'd be safe and I'd be protected and I'd be treasured (Liz).

Nancy added to this with an explanation that her abuser initially

treated me how I wanted, how I thought women should be treated. The flowers at work and the nice restaurants and the nice weekends away. All the things that I thought, this is life, I love it (Nancy).

Emotion though, especially feelings of love, went on to generate some conflict, contradiction and ambivalence for participants. Their understandings of what it meant to love and be loved created confusing dilemmas for them. They desired what they understood and expected loving relationships to include, as Liz and Nancy explain above. If heterosexual coupledness is understood as discourse, as discursively constituted out of the various expectations, investments, desires, understandings and so on available to individuals at particular points in time, then attached to and shaped by these are a range of closely prescribed positions available to each sex within that discourse. Successful achievement of heterosexual coupledness is therefore reliant upon each partner not only understanding and accepting the various gendered rights and responsibilities contained within that discursive field, but also demonstrating that understanding and acceptance through their everyday activity. As described above, Nancy for instance believed that participation in this institution included flowers, nice dinners and weekends away – the concrete markers perhaps of the loved, protected and treasured status described by Liz?

Nancy also understood though that these rights and benefits were accompanied by specific responsibilities, mainly connected with pleasing her partner, explaining that she

loved [partner] deeply and I think that's probably why if [partner] said jump I would ask how high. Because I wanted to do anything and everything I could to please (Nancy).

This notion of pleasing one's partner was echoed by a number of participants, with women often speaking of trying to be better wives and/or lovers in order to gain their abuser's approval. Some received clear instruction from others about how best to achieve

this, with Anita for instance being advised by her partner's mother to have the housework done before he got home so that noisy household appliances wouldn't upset him. She was also told to "have a baby, so that you are at home all the time anyway, and you can do all the jobs". The inference here of course is that happiness in relationships is gained through doing all one can, even reproducing, in order to tailor the life and home required by one's partner.

Most spoke of loving the men who abused them, thus placing them in an impossible position of somehow reconciling the irreconcilable, of having to find some way to marry their desire for protection, safety and loving coupledness with their lived experiences of violence, pain and fear. Some achieved this by assuming responsibility for their victimization, using their love to justify behaviour they 'knew' to be stupid or misguided. As Laura explains,

I mean I'm not a stupid person. I mean, nobody...people think of battered women as being women who want a good smacking around or women who aren't intelligent enough to do anything about it...but that wasn't the case. I mean, I really cared about him. I think I really loved him for years, even though he abused me (Laura).

Others followed the same path of self-blame but included secrecy within their management strategy. These women protected themselves and their abusers by hiding the abuse from friends and family, in hindsight castigating themselves for doing so but attributing their actions to love of their partner. As Heather explains,

I didn't tell them [parents] because I covered it up for [partner], because I really loved him. I was really stupid; I can't believe I did all that (Heather).

As Laura's comments above illustrate, many women felt that those around them saw (or were likely to see) their love for their abuser as irrational and dangerously self-destructive once abuse was disclosed and, while accepting this reading on at least some

level, remained immensely reluctant to give up on their desire for loving partnerships. Angie's account below provides a graphic illustration of how loving one's abuser can overpower the desire or need for safety, at least in the short term.

His mum, she actually saw my body, you know, it was just covered in bruises this particular day and she said to me 'you leave that mongrel bastard now'. And those were her words and I remember saying to her, 'no, I'm not going to leave him now'. I mean I was in love with him. Very in love with him, but I didn't love the things he was doing to me and I knew for myself I had to get out of it (Angie).

Love, and more especially the desire to protect their relationship status, was often closely associated with talk of shame and embarrassment in the women's stories. Angie, for instance, spoke of feelings of intensely shame filled fear at the thought of returning to her home town and admitting to having lost her man. In this sense her shame was related to a fear of being seen as failing against a particular gender standard, that which mandates heterosexual coupledness as the natural, normal and desirable way of doing or being mature femininity. Debra echoed Angie, talking at length about feeling that she always 'had to have a man', indeed noting that she felt somewhat of a (shamed) failure if she was single and alone. Many other participants talked of similar feelings, acknowledging their understanding of the gendered expectations influencing the ways they went about their everyday lives.

Shame and failure in relation to heterosexual coupledness also surfaced in their stories in a very different way however. Many women talked of how they attempted to preserve the appearance of 'normal' happy coupledness by hiding or disguising the violence from others. Others noted the way they managed their relationships by excusing and/or explaining abuse away, or accepted apologies and forgave their abusers. For these women their shame was attached to another, albeit still strongly gendered, set of standards or expectations, this time connected to the right or appropriate way of doing coupledness as a woman. Built around discursively constructed notions of heterosexual coupledness as naturally happy, loving and non-violent, these expectations come along with a converse

understanding of unhappy abusive coupledness as somehow demonstrating abnormality and/or shame generating failure. Angie for instance told me of her reluctance to call police when assaulted with a hammer out of fear that she might know the attending officer (or that he might recognize her!). Debra carefully tried to hide her bruises in order to protect her position within the community, a strategy closely followed by Anita in her construction of long and elaborate accounts of ‘accidental’ bruising.

Other particular gendered responsibilities awarded to women by discourses of heterosexual coupledness were evidenced in participants’ talk, especially in the many instances where they spoke of their fear of the shame attached to a sort of ‘agency failure’ on their part. This involved a generally unquestioned understanding that they were knowingly responsible for their decisions to form and continue relationships with abusive men and that others would judge them negatively because of this. These women spoke repeatedly of not wanting others to become aware of their ‘mistake’ or bad ‘choice’, fearing the shame and embarrassment of others knowing how ‘foolish’ they had been or still were. Paula for instance, offered this account.

I never actually told her. But here were occasions where, shit, I remember this: Walking down the bloody road, that road you just drove down, because she stayed just up the other end, one kid on my shoulders and one in my arms, and it was raining. And it was a long walk, probably about a mile, two miles, with this weight. And I had to have the baby - the things you think about, I had the baby upside-down, well back-up, so that the rain would hit her back, and I just carried on, carried on. But I think that’s the only time she knew for certain, because I just arrived, bloody every where.... I might have been a bit blasé about it all. Something like “Ah, the bloody bastard’s done it again!” Nothing big. I realized now, I didn’t want her to know. Because, for some darn reason, I thought that it was a reflection on me, that I chose him. And so I wasn’t, so I didn’t want her to think – oh you dick! What are you doing staying there? (Paula).

All of these women did eventually separate from their abusers. However, given the rewards most participants believed to come attached to the institution of heterosexual coupledness, this was often not an easy process. For instance, Julie's desire for the attractive package of heterosexual coupledness, especially when fleshed out with her dreams of children, white picket fences, a lovely home and so on, led her to excuse and forgive an extremely violent beginning, remaining with her abuser for more than ten years. Her expectations led her to anticipate change in her partner's behaviour as they gradually acquired the various material trappings she had learnt to associate with heterosexual coupledness. Her desire for the loving happy partnership she been taught to expect enabled her to produce three more children, become dependant on alcohol and prescription drugs, suffer multiple facial fractures, lose most of her teeth and spend several periods of time in a local psychiatric ward. Indeed, it was this very desire for the version of heterosexual coupledness Julie 'knew' to be possible which enabled and encouraged this extremely destructive perseverance. All that was required was that *she* make it work!

I mean, I thought this isn't right, but I sort of just hung in there, and I think being my first relationship – you want it to work. You know, and I really tried my best. I tried all kinds of ways to please him, but there was nothing I could do to make him happy. He was just angry full-stop....I sort of found excuses for him too – I deserved it I suppose. But he was a lad, like he always was, he wanted to be home with his tea cooked on time, and if it'd shrieved up, you'd done something wrong, or he didn't want that. So, it was just...the problem was him. But I thought it was me. I blamed me a lot. That's why I stayed in the relationship. Trying to work things out so I thought – well if I change my ways, maybe that will make this relationship go better, but no, it didn't....You think: This is my man! And he's the one for me. So you just do all of the things that he wants you to do because it makes him happy. And I think that women in general think like that: Look after your man (Julie).

This excerpt from Julie is rich in its detail of what she expected (and accepted) as her responsibilities within the relationship. She was to care for him, cook for him, anticipate his wants and nurture his emotional wellbeing – in short, to generally attend to each and every facet of relationship maintenance. Fortunately Julie did eventually abandon her dream of loving heterosexual coupledness, leaving abuser when he threatened her children's lives with cyanide. Liz and Nancy too eventually separated from their partners after years of life with violently controlling men. While the intensely destructive experience these women describe may not be one shared by all, the pathways they took towards heterosexual coupledness are ones still followed by the majority of women today, with most expecting their adult lives to be played out within the context of equitable (non-abusive) male/female partnership/marriage. As several participants noted, the pressure of this expectation, the need to 'have a man', was a powerful motivator in their lives.

I went through this thing that I was only half a person if I didn't have a man to go out with. Or a partner. And I've got three girlfriends who will go to the movies on their own and I would never entertain that idea. And I've always had to have a man in my life. So when I met [abuser] it was all - oh here's my new bloke who wants me, rather than me - do I want him? And I think that's always been my thing. I can honestly say that I don't think I've ever married for love. It's been status. Status and having a man. Having a man.... Why women think they have to have - be in a relationship I don't know. I was always taught that you weren't a complete person unless you had a man there beside you (Debra).

The discourse of heterosexual coupledness, reinforced by both spoken and unspoken societal expectations (Murray, 2008), remains a powerful influence in the lives of many women. While unproblematic for many, even perhaps most women, for those involved in abusive relationships these expectations can become the site of, again, virtually guaranteed failure. Leaving the abuser signals an inability to maintain all-important couple status, and opens up the very real risk of social ostracism and/or alienation (Lay 2006), while staying entails surrendering to the knowledge that one has failed to achieve

a ‘proper’ happy, non-abusive partnership. Many women described the way this knowledge translated into a sense of shame, both for participating in an abusive partnership *and* leaving or ending the relationship. This shame flavored their decision-making processes significantly and, for some, continued to impede their access to help and support even after separation from their abuser. Angie, part of a large and caring extended family, isolated herself from their potential support because she feared returning to her home town after ending her relationship. As she explains,

I couldn't actually decide where I wanted to live either when I first came back and the humiliation of living back here, and you know, 'oh yeah, she's single again', was just too much to cope with (Angie).

In another example, Laura, who had described her current marriage as extremely loving and supportive, wrote to me after our initial interview to tell me how our conversation had provided her the impetus to finally speak openly with her husband about her abusive experience. In this letter she recounts telling him about the immense sense of shame and guilt she had carried since being forced to terminate a pregnancy by her abuser and describes the huge weight that was lifted off her shoulders when he responded with compassion and understanding. Her letter conveyed regret that this misplaced sense of shame had inhibited her ability to seek his support much earlier.

As the discussion above illustrates, the subject positioning(s) opened to participants by their use of the particular discursive resources or repertoires constituting the discourse of heterosexual coupledness, although framed within a language of choice and individual agency (most women spoke of having ‘chosen’ their relationship status), were in reality tightly constrained. The ‘choices’ open to them, the ways in which they could be and do ‘heterosexual woman’, were in fact closely prescribed. For instance, alternative sexualities, including asexuality, were largely ruled out, as was living an uncoupled or even multiply coupled life. Most participants spoke of a sense of needing to enter into (heterosexual) relationship in order to take up the positioning they felt to be a ‘natural’ part of their lives as women. Quite apart from this taken-for-granted dismissal of

distinctly different lifestyle options though, even the specific form of heterosexual coupledness, its imagined content, was highly prescribed as Julie's words above indicate. Many of the various 'things' they expected (and were expected) to be or do were clearly understood. For instance, most took motherhood as an inevitable, even natural progression within the usual trajectory of heterosexual coupledness, an idea I will return to in later sections.

As with their knowledge of what constituted 'right and proper' ways of being and doing heterosexual coupledness, many of those women who had been married to their abusers brought very clear understandings and expectations around the institution of matrimony to their marriages. Not only did they anticipate that they would be loved and cared for, but also that they were entering into a shared financial endeavor. Nancy, for instance, was more than happy to follow community protocol in marrying her lover, but was incredibly surprised at his request that she sign a pre nuptial property agreement.

We got married in the March, which was really quick [she had known him for around 3 months] and he wanted me to sign, which was my first experience of it, but he wanted me to sign a contract that said that I would lay no claim to his business. And I thought but hey, aren't we going into marriage and isn't marriage all joint? Isn't it, you know, don't we just pool it together and go for it? I married in 1972 and thought that marriage was just what everybody did, part of the community and for everybody else as well (Nancy).

Clearly, for Nancy, marriage was a taken-for-granted part of women's lives at this time, was simply what one did to demonstrate that one was part of the community. However, despite this taken-for-grantedness, to simply marry was not in itself sufficient. Once married it was then important to demonstrate that one's participation in the institution was successful. Although an image incredibly difficult to sustain in an abusive context, it was positioning that most participants went to great lengths to preserve, at least initially, but not without destructive consequences. The desire to avoid the shame and stigma attached to 'bad' or 'unhappy' marriages was noted by several women as influential in

maintaining their abusive relationships – barring them from potential support sources and operating to further reinforce their self-blame.

I wanted everyone to think I had the perfect marriage. And it was far from it. I didn't want people to know. You know, to me, marriages are something for life. That was my thoughts anyhow. And I'm not a strong Christian person, but to me they were sacred vows that are supposed to last. I lived in this little dream world. What an idiot. I would never do it again. Ever. I'd hate to wake up every morning, with black eyes, and split lips, or broken teeth or my face so disfigured that I couldn't see. People didn't know who I was. I fell down lots of stairs, got hit by lots of fridges, always lied - because I didn't want people to think it's not a perfect marriage. It just sounds like I was the most stupidest bitch on two feet. I was. For putting up with it. I was mad. I was crazy. But at the time I thought that I was doing the right thing (Ruby).

Ruby's final words in this excerpt cut to the very core of the comments outlined above. She thought she was 'doing the right thing', preserving an illusion of a happy 'perfect' marriage – a relationship built within the socially constructed scaffolding of dominant discourses of heterosexual coupledness. As her punitive self-assessment suggests, one consequence of the shame at her failure was a cruelly vicious self-blaming. This sense of responsibility for her abuse – and fear of how others might label her should this be revealed, exerted a powerful influence on Ruby's decision-making processes in terms of separating from her violent husband.

It was however another strand of the discourse of heterosexual coupledness and matrimony, that of marriage as monogamous⁴⁷, which provided the impetus Ruby needed to finally escape her abuser. Despite feminist challenges to monogamy as a primary reinforcer of notions of male ownership of female bodies (hooks, 2000), the rule of women's sexual fidelity and faithfulness to one's spouse remains central to discourses of

⁴⁷ Broadly defined as “a pattern by an individual of sexual interaction with only one other person during a given period within that individual's life” (Overall 1998 p.4),

heterosexual coupledness and matrimony, indeed is almost a mandatory requirement of heterosexual relationships (Munson & Stelboum, 1999). Many of the women spoke of their understandings of monogamy, their belief that faithfulness and fidelity were implicit to their marriage contract, with this creating its own shaming issues for some. As Marla Brettschneider notes, “monogamy promises sexual and emotional riches; without it one is barren, impoverished, depraved” (2006, p.124), a description that resonated with many of their stories. For most this was demonstrated in a sense of shame they felt when they discovered that their husbands were unfaithful, feeling that this was somehow their fault and thus prodding them to further intensify their efforts to please. As Nancy said, she tried

the perfume, the no perfume, the new nightie, the no nightie, the, you know, I did the lot, to try and get the right thing but couldn't strike it (Nancy).

She eventually abandoned her efforts, but not until she found out about her husband's infidelity, discovered while he was serving a period of incarceration [for convictions not related to his abuse] which propelled her out of the relationship. Stephenson, Kippax *et al.*, (1994) contend that trust is central to discourses of coupledness and, certainly for Ruby and Nancy this was a baseline requirement, absolutely necessary within her relationship and, given her prolonged experience of extreme physical violence, perhaps even more important than her and her children's physical safety. Indeed her words suggest that she may well have continued to submit to his abuse had he not offended against her sense of trust and loyalty.

Our marriage could have worked. But I became bitter because I was there for him through thick and thin and he just kept on continually abusing me. Hurting me. And hurting my kids too. I couldn't have lived with a person who I couldn't trust. I mean while he was in prison I was the most faithful, devoted wife you could wish for. And to think that someone could cheat on me, that hurt (Ruby).

An expectation of loyalty, both to be given and received, was central to the relationships of a number of participants. While for Ruby this ultimately had a positive effect, enabling her to reach the decision to separate from her husband, for many other women this was not the case. The sense of loyalty they saw as being part of marriage and coupledness instead led them to disguise the abuse within their relationships, thus further isolating them from potential supports. Many of their abusers intensified this isolation by skillfully appropriating the language of monogamy, using allegations of infidelity to justify their violence, thus leading some women to choose to deliberately isolate themselves, particularly from other men, as a protective strategy. Miriam was one who chose to physically isolate herself after a particularly frightening incident. As she explains,

one night he decided that I'd looked at somebody else too much and that I may prefer to be with them. So he actually put a bed spread over top of me and wrapped some cord around my throat - the bed spread over the top of me and spun me round in the room and talked about killing me and not letting me go and stuff like that (Miriam).

For Miriam, the risk of physical harm was simply too real to ignore after this incident, making it far safer and far easier to remain within the confines of her home as much as possible in an effort to avoid any potential repeat. For others their isolation strategy took the form of keeping their heads down, eyes averted and mouth closed whenever they were in a public space. As Angie explains

I actually didn't open my mouth. When we were together, if anyone asked me a question, he'd speak for me. I'd just sit there behind him and when [partner] and I were together and when we'd split up and all the rest of it, she rang me and she'd just split up with her husband too so I came back and we flatted together. And she described me and she said to me, you know, when you were with [partner], she said, you actually looked really old she said, and I thought you didn't have any teeth. And I was really dumbfounded by that and I said what do

you mean no teeth? And she said, whenever you spoke, you always had your head down and your hand over your mouth when you spoke (Angie).

The women's need to demonstrate loyalty (or at least avoid open display disloyalty) as a marker of matrimonial wellbeing was closely related to the distribution of responsibility within relationships. One of the cornerstones of marital health and harmony noted by many participants, an area they perceived as a central responsibility of women/wives, was that of emotional caretaking and relationship maintenance. That they discharged this duty successfully (and could be seen to be doing so) was extremely important for many. For them, failure against this particular standard, although virtually inevitable in the context of an abusive relationship, was something that they not only found hugely difficult to acknowledge, but which also worked to isolate them from support. In the excerpt below Angie talks about why she felt unable to approach family or friends for help and why, when she did leave her relationship, she experienced intense discomfort when returning home as a newly single woman.

[I] never spoke to anyone. I was scared that if I spoke to anyone about what he was doing to me, they wouldn't like him and he wouldn't be accepted. [That was] very important. Having a partner that people really liked, you know, and so it was good, 'cause it took the pressure off me off me finding a partner that fitted in to the family so easily. Everybody loved him. They thought that he was wonderful and nobody knew....I was really scared, because, I mean, [partner] my third engagement, and I was really scared that they'd be sort of 'oh God what've you done now?' You know, 'why have you lost another man?' He was so wonderful and I really felt that I needed to, to come up with an excuse. I was so scared about coming home. Really, really scared about coming home and facing people and saying, you know 'another engagement that didn't work', the humiliation of living back here, and you know, 'oh yeah, she's single again', was just too much to cope with.....I've always gone through life where I've always had to be in a relationship (Angie).

Angie remained with her abusive partner for some four years, struggling with a sense of responsibility and self-blame and intense fear over how others would react – whatever she did (Lay, 2006). Her fears were, in the main, unfounded. Most friends and family were supportive and understanding when the story began to be told, with the exception of her father (himself a man not averse to disciplining his wife) who remarked “if you weren’t such a bitch to live with, he wouldn’t have left you”. This comment in itself is a powerful illustration of Angie’s sense of shame around the ending of her relationship. Although responsible for terminating the relationship she had chosen not to tell her father this in an attempt to avoid anticipated criticism over her failure to preserve her appropriately coupled status.

Debra’s story was similar to Angie’s, both in terms of the abuse and humiliation she suffered and her fears about the reactions of others. She was deeply afraid of anyone finding out about the violence, either remaining indoors after a beating or carefully disguising her bruises with makeup. Interestingly, and an excellent example of Goffman’s notion of “audience tact”, is Debra’s discovery, some time after leaving her husband, that this had been a fruitless strategy. A close friend revealed in the course of a conversation about the relationship that many others had not only been aware of the abuse but had had little difficulty seeing the evidence of beatings, despite Debra’s efforts at concealment. In conversation with this friend, she was told,

“you used to come to the meeting and you were obviously bruised, but you thought that you were hiding it. And we used to think, how can she sit here in this meeting, him at one end being the board, and you at the other end being the reporter?” But I just thought that I’d done my make up so beautifully that no one would know (Debra).

Much government policy around family violence is based on an implicit belief that intervention is both desirable and effective⁴⁸. However there is still little conclusive

⁴⁸ See, for example, ‘Creating a culture of non-violence: the report from the open hearing into the prevention of violence against women and children’ (2005), a report from the New Zealand

research evidence around either the efficacy or most desirable shape of such intervention. So, while one could wonder what the result would have been had these bystanders addressed the violence at that time, it is entirely possible that Debra would have followed the same trajectory regardless, given her fear of the perceived stigma of failure and divorce.

I had my own income, and no dependants, so there was really nothing holding me back except pride. I'd already had one divorce and really didn't want to have another failed divorce.....It probably was peer pressure - oh God she's failed again. And I was just saying to a friend on the phone on Saturday night, I'm the only person in our whole family - that's my mum's and dad's family and all the cousins, and probably their children now, who has a failed marriage, and [I've] got two! (Debra).

For other women though it wasn't so much a fear of being alone or divorced per se, but rather a desire to avoid being seen as having not done or given enough to preserve their relationship (Murray, 2008), a positioning graphically illustrated in this account offered by Adrienne.

I'd either been with him three or four years. I can't remember which one it was now. We had this huge argument and I went for a really big walk and I remember thinking, and I was thinking, you know, I was thinking about the whole thing. And I knew that I had to start listening to my intuition and what was actually right. Like, what was my feeling was right. And I knew then that it just wasn't going to work. But, I carried on for another three or four years....All these things I used to do. Like if it was, I mean, like even right down to how I would do things because that was the way he wanted it. It was so important that absolutely everything was totally done right all the time. I had this feeling that I really had to give it everything that there was. I kept feeling that I had to make sure that I had done

everything possible. That could possibly make this relationship work. And I think that comes from the socialization that a woman, like this is an analysis now of it. That a woman's role is to make a happy home. And if the home isn't happy or the man is going out bonking someone else or something, that is very normal, fulfilling what you ought to be doing at home, 'cause if you were making it all right then he wouldn't be out doing that would he? You know, so I felt that I had to do everything to death (Adrienne).

For Adrienne, exactly how one was to provide this 'happy home' was quite clear. She was to look and dress the part, cook and attend to the house in the correct fashion, think and act in an appropriate way, attend to his sexual desires and so on. Taken in isolation, none of these points seem terribly important, but all held a distinctly gendered shape, could even be considered copybook illustrations of traditional gender roles. Together they created a closely controlled environment and, because her partner both set and monitored performance parameters, they also combined to generate a pervasive climate of uncertainty and always imminent failure. As Adrienne explains,

I never knew what was going to happen. About anything. I mean, I would be run down for what I cooked for dinner, how I cooked for dinner, how I looked, what I wore, you know. I can remember going out one night and feeling, you know like, and I was sort of quite large and the only thing he could pick on me was the color of my lipstick. You know, and having people around for dinner and 'why did you set the table like that?' 'Why did you cut the carrots like that?' You know, crap like that, and it was constantly...you know, constant, constant attacking any sense of sense of me. You know, like he would say to me 'now what do you want to make you happy?' You know, like, 'so what are your goals in life?' And so I'd say 'I just want to be happy'. 'Well that's not a goal'. You know, 'what do you want to achieve in life?' 'I just want to be happy'. 'Well that's not, that's not an achievement' (Adrienne).

The extent of these expectations and how they strove to meet them, along with the anticipated consequences of failure, featured in many of the women's stories. In the two following excerpts Nancy and Debra talk about their attempts to please their husbands. Both women believed that it was their responsibility as wives to perform a wide range of relationship and family maintenance tasks and accepted their failure to do so satisfactorily as adequate justification of their punishment (Murray, 2008). In a similar way to Adrienne, Nancy's knowledge of how position herself as a 'good' wife extended to accepting responsibility for her husband's sexual satisfaction. As a result she was initially unquestioning of his emotional punishment and infidelity, accepting these as the consequences of her failure, whereas Debra simply worked even harder to meet her husband's unstated performance criteria.

maybe I was, you know, I was the bad lover so he had to go elsewhere to find something and it obviously, you know, even though I tried everything that there was. You know, the perfume, the no perfume, the new nightie, the no nightie, the, you know, I did the lot, to try and get the right thing but couldn't strike it (Nancy).

There was always a reason, and you could think - oh I'll change my behaviour, and like I knitted for the children too much, or I watch the wrong television programmes or I read too much or I cooked the wrong meal. So you know, you always tried to change your behaviour, so that that [punishment] wouldn't happen. And I was working for him as his receptionist and you'd always make sure you were home, and lunch was on the table at 12, even though he'd often be held up at [workplace]. But you did that. And then you'd be home at five and you'd get the children organized, so that you - you just worked around it (Debra).

It seems then that for these women the subject position of wife and/or partner carried with it a wide range of requirements, standards to be met before claiming such a position for oneself could be warranted. This is, at face value, a largely unproblematic and commonsense statement. Without such specifics the notion of identity, at least in any describable form, tends to collapse into nothingness. In these cases though, because the

exact content of the requirements, the rules around the ‘doing’ of particular subject positions, were largely tacit and subject to frequent, arbitrary and generally non-negotiable alteration by their abusers, the women’s ability to position themselves as good wives was severely constrained. In my earlier exploration of the ‘fit’ between Erving Goffman’s concepts of the total institution, mortification of self and intimate partner abuse, I identified this fluctuation and fluidity around ‘rules’ as an important part of the loss of self talked about by many participants. These women spoke of the sense of inadequacy and failure to which this inevitably gave rise. By ensuring that their partners could never quite get a grip on how to be or do good wives, these abusive men maintained an everyday environment of chaos and confusion within which the women simply could not succeed, thus constantly exposing them to the risk of failing, along with the painful sense of shame often experienced as a result.

Motherhood

In addition to extremely influential notions of how to ‘properly’ participate in the institutions of heterosexual coupledness and matrimony, many participants’ accounts also pointed to the powerful constitutive influence of another dominant gendered discourse, that of motherhood (Irwin, Thorne & Varcoe, 2002; Varcoe & Irwin, 2004). As noted earlier, many of the women understood motherhood to be a virtually inevitable progression within heterosexual relationship. Indeed some worked hard and even took significant risks with their health in order to avoid pregnancy as they struggled to negotiate ever-increasing conflict between their expectations and the everyday realities of living with an abusive partner.

I didn't want any more children. I'd got pregnant very early after [daughter] was born and I guess it is a blessing. [Husband] gave me a hell of a hiding one night and I lost that one so that was quite good. Down the track I got pregnant again because it was easy to miss the pill with that sort of shift work. So they put me on, I went on the injection which sort of solved everything except I got cancer of the uterus and they felt the injection had contributed to that and in fact they didn't

want me to use any contraceptives. So my specialist agreed to tie my tubes and I was twenty-six which is quite young but I was not prepared to take the risk of getting pregnant because that's all [husband] wanted. [Husband] liked it when he had control which meant me at home, him at work. Didn't have the money - didn't have the choices... and that suited him nicely (Liz).

I went into the doctor and I said I want a pregnancy test. And the nurse said "Oh yes, we'll give you a urine test". And I said "No, I want a blood test. I want to know if I'm pregnant, now". Those urine tests aren't a hundred percent you know. And this was in 1989/90. And she said "Well, we've got an issue here". And I said "No, no. There's no issue. Here's my arm, here's a vein. Blood." Anyway, I'm moved to the doctor now and he said "Um, if you are pregnant?" "I want an abortion. There is no way I'm having a baby to the man that I'm with, who is the father of my child. There is no way." Because I just viewed that as wrong. That would have been a ball and chain definitely. Not just around my neck, but my child's neck. There was no way (Anita).

It seems that these particular understandings of motherhood were shared by the partners of these women, with many going to some lengths to impregnate their victims. Although it is doubtful that they would have couched it in such bald terms, it is clear that these men were very aware of the way motherhood can serve to tighten the bonds of heterosexual coupledness and matrimony and make women's escape from violence and control more difficult.

I was made redundant and he wouldn't let me go back to work. He decided that, no, you can stay home and we can try for children. So what I was doing was sneaking off to the doctor and having the depo [IV contraceptive] until he started coming into the doctors with me. He'd come into the doctors and sit there while they spoke to me (Angie).

And he desperately wanted me to have a baby. Desperately. I was on the pill of course. He used to throw my pills away when he'd find them. I thought – what a dork – because I've got them in my car, I've got them at school, I've got them at my Mum's house, and I'd abort anyway. And that, I mean I, I mean abortion is a personal choice, and I don't have any issues with that. I would have aborted. There is no way I would have ever had had his baby (Anita).

So then, given that these women tried so hard to avoid pregnancy, what were the understandings of motherhood which they brought to their relationships? Why was avoiding pregnancy such a key strategy for these women as they negotiated their experiences of abuse? To begin unraveling these questions I turned to the accounts of women who had given birth to children within their abusive relationships in order to see how it was that they managed the reality of mothering within this particular context (Hardesty, 2002). Many noted, somewhat paradoxically, that it was their children who initially kept them within the relationship but also provided much of the impetus to leave (Irwin, Thorne & Varcoe, 2002). Most had quite a clear picture of how mothering 'should' be, what shape they anticipated their experience of motherhood to take. Many held optimistic and determinedly positive beliefs, with Penny and Julie for instance believing that fatherhood would somehow alter their abusers' behaviour.

When we had (son) I thought it might get better 'cause things had got pretty bad by then. It was probably about every week or so and when we had (son) I thought it would make him happier 'cause he always said he wanted a son but it didn't (Penny).

After my first child, my first son, which I'd planned to have thinking that that might settle him. I think a lot of it was about change and that this might make a happy family. So after our first son was born, we got a new home and we worked and we had it all. I had it all. I had my picket fence, but it wasn't white, had a new car, a new lovely Lockwood home which I'd always wanted and our son. But the abuse got worse (Julie).

Other women, like Selene for instance, held closely detailed and equally optimistic understandings of motherhood, expressing anger and bitterness that their experience had been so far removed from their expectations.

Like when my son was born, I mean, it's supposed to be your happiest time, you know, going home, he didn't turn up. He was supposed to pick me up in the morning and he didn't turn up till late in the evening and that was only 'cause his mother got him out of the pub. Now when he came to pick me up, he was too drunk to drive so I had to drive and so we get home and it's supposed to be quite a special, you know, moment with your child. But anyway, he sort of robbed me of all those special times, you know, like, you know, coming home with your first child, and things like that (Selene).

These then were some of the expectations women held as they entered the realms of motherhood. However their lived experience often diverged wildly from these, a dissonance at least partially explained by close examination of contemporary discourses of mothering (O'Reilly, 2004). This uncovers a complicated, conflicted and often contradictory set of understandings that, particularly within the context of an abusive relationship, guarantee women's 'failure' as mothers in one way or another. What is ensured then is that women living in abusive contexts will inevitably experience conflict as they struggle to 'get it right' and somehow avoid the stinging sense of shame attached to failure in what is, for many, a central facet of their identity. To the forefront of current ideas of mothering is a clear protective imperative; it is still, whatever the advances of feminism, primarily mothers who are held to be responsible for ensuring the physical, psychological and emotional safety of their children. Indeed Barbara Johnson (cited in Sugiyami, 2000, p.9), in her analysis of how women are so often held responsible for harm suffered by their children, contends that any "death of a child is perceived as a crime committed by the mother, something a mother ought *by definition* to be able to prevent" (emphasis added).

Within dominant discourses of motherhood, ‘good’ mothers are those women who position themselves (or allow their positioning) as nurturing, caring, loving, gentle (yet fiercely protective), selfless and so on *and* are expected to demonstrate these qualities through the ways in which they care for their children. Many participants worked extremely hard to warrant this positive positioning (Davies & Krane, 2006), although some, with the benefit of hindsight, now question whether their actions were indeed good for their children. Some even note a sense of shame and/or guilt in relation to their mothering but could see no alternative at the time. As Ruby explains,

I mean my kids are my life. And that really is a bad thing too sometimes. But you can't help it. Because I'm it. I sometimes see it, especially for [son], because it's made him dependant on me. Even [daughter], when her and [partner] went to live together [overseas], you know, she can't do the washing, and she can't cook the food and she's a lousy house keeper, simply because I did it all for them. And that is a terrible thing to do. But because they were all I had, I did it. And I didn't really enjoy doing it either. But I did it because I was all they had and I probably felt guilty (Ruby).

It seems then that even following the ‘right’ script, as Ruby thought she was doing, may not have the most positive result. Conversely, women may find themselves positioned (shamefully) as ‘bad’ mothers should they be seen as somehow failing to do so (Davies & Krane, 2006), a positioning difficult to avoid if they are identified as exposing their children to violence and abuse. Most participants had a clear understanding that it was not a good thing for children to see their mother being abused. For some, protecting them from this was spoken of as a key responsibility of motherhood and their inability to always do so was one of the factors which enabled them to eventually end their abusive relationships, as illustrated with these accounts from Heather and Paula.

It wasn't long before he was hitting me in front of [son]. [son] would be in his jolly-jumper and we'd start arguing and he had me up against the wall with his hands around my neck in front of [son], and he'd be screaming and crying. And I

was actually getting to the point where I couldn't stand seeing him do this to my son. It was [son] that made me leave him because I couldn't stand him doing that in front of him. He was just so scared. He's be just shaking, he was so frightened of [partner] (Heather).

I used to hear her [neighbour] getting bounced off the walls, and I thought it must be happening all over the place, and I learnt a trick off her. I would hear her run outside, put the kids in the car, lock the doors, and go back in the house for her hiding. And I learnt that trick off her. I would lock my kids in the car so that they didn't have to see it. If I had a chance, that is. She did the same thing I did. She would take the kids up the end room. And, because there's a little latch on the top, she'd lock them in there so they didn't see when he was giving her hidings (Paula).

In addition to these powerful imperatives of protection though, an equally strong dual positioning operates. This works to link the identities of wife and mother, sliding together smoothly the imperatives of discourses of motherhood and heterosexual coupledom to create an even more powerfully seductive discursive package. What is (strongly) suggested by this enhanced discursive presentation is that children are best raised within a traditional heterosexual nuclear family consisting of a mother, father and children. This is a model strongly emphasized by resurgent appeals for the reinstatement of traditional 'family values' in recent times. The conflicts, both emotional and material, which these irreconcilable positions create for women involved in abusive relationships is graphically illustrated in these excerpts from Bronwyn, Ruby and Liz.

I suppose at that stage it happened once every six months or so, which didn't seem at the time bad enough to break a relationship. I thought I was doing right by the kids staying in the relationship because he was a good father. The kids adored him (Bronwyn).

I was scared to go because I had a young child and then I got pregnant again, and I felt that I couldn't, I didn't know what to do because I didn't know where to go or what to do. So I stayed in it, thinking all the time that this isn't really good for my kids to see, but thinking we were a young family and I was scared that if I left I would lose that (Ruby).

So I'd go back - particularly once I had the children. It was harder to walk away because I came from a broken marriage and I thought I owed the kids their parents - their birth parents. It was their right....He [husband] came from a family of eight, a good Catholic upbringing and a good normal - what I would call, and often, for a long time, called a normal upbringing. You know, his own mother, his own father (Liz).

The power of this specific element of mothering discourse is demonstrated also by several participants in describing an ongoing and sometimes harshly critical questioning process around their children's well-being since leaving the abusive relationship. Ruby and April offer clear demonstration of this in expressing concern for their sons.

Through out the trouble I've had with [son] I've always wondered if that was the reason why he did it [attempted suicide]. I mean I know he can't read or write very well, and I always think he whole-heartedly blames me for it, because I left his father and he had no father. You can't get, [son] won't talk, he is okay now, because I finally brought in some male role-models into his life (Ruby).

My son was three and I thought, he's growing up without a father and I'd get overcome with this guilt, and he's nearly 22 and a couple of times I said to him, do you really sort of regret not having your father around, and he said - no, not really. So it was quite good. Maybe he just says that so I don't feel so bad, but. He's not had much to do with him but he knows what he's like. So it's like, I've got these two little boys who have this emotional attachment to

him, and part of me still thinks what did I do to [son] by taking him away from his father. While he says that he is fine with it, I don't want to go through all of that again, thinking that I did the wrong thing (April).

Two other participants, Nancy and Theresa, offer equally graphic examples of the immense conflict experienced by so many women as they attempt to manage irreconcilable responsibilities in the context of parenting within an abusive relationship. As the discussion above suggests, this is a tall order in any circumstances but one which mushrooms almost beyond imagination within the confines of current discourses of motherhood.

I was really lost because I felt I'd been a failure, to my children. Because, one, I'd turned their father away from them. They didn't have a father in the eyes of what the community said was a father. I felt that I wasn't a good mother for that reason (Nancy).

I didn't want to hurt them or growl at them or anything like that. I wanted them to - I just wanted to be there for them and give them whatever they needed. Which is bad, now, because I actually gave them more than I should have I think. But I was so scared and so guilty that they didn't have a father and I'd done it. I'd taken them away from the family situation (Theresa).

In this case Nancy is accepting sole responsibility, not for any distinct personal failure as a mother, but for failing to provide a 'proper' father for her children (Patton, 2003). Within the context of an abusive relationship, some strands of mothering discourse it seems simply cannot coexist peacefully; failure one way or another is literally inevitable (Varcoe & Irwin, 2004). On the one hand, either a mother maintains the nuclear family model, in which case she exposes her children to an abusive relationship, an action now widely accepted as extremely harmful to children. On the other, she leaves the abusive relationship, this still being seen as the most effective means of dealing with abuse (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007; Yoshihoka, 2005 & Choy), and thereby dismantles the family

unit (and risks destroying their relationship with their father) (Boyd, 2003, Patton, 2003). The choice effectively becomes one not of avoiding failure, but of deciding what particular form this failure will take. This is an issue compounded should the woman facing such failure have experienced its consequences in her family of origin. Miriam, for instance, spoke at length about the additional layer of conflict added to her decision-making process by her experience as a child following the break-up of her parent's violent marriage.

All the stigma too, like my mother left my father at a time when it was not that kosher. You know. I remember, if I was naughty at school, it was because I came from a broken family. You know. It was stated in front of me, you know, well, you know, that's what happens when you're in a broken family, you know, so we were kind of like, down there anyway (Miriam).

The future facing her children was extremely clear to Miriam given her own prior experience. Were she to leave their father, her children would be automatically constituted by others as 'at risk' or 'troubled', as victims of a tragic family breakdown. As Miriam's account suggests, positioning of children in this particular way is a far from neutral action, constituting them as 'down there', as socially inferior in some way, attaching along the way the various disadvantages and discriminatory practices associated with such subject positioning.

Not surprisingly some participants also experienced a great deal of conflict in terms of managing their emotional responses to the abuse in their lives. This was not so much in relation to managing the way they felt, but rather in terms of how others perceived they *should* be feeling and/or acting, both as victims and mothers. Julie, for instance, became extremely angry – hardly surprising, even perhaps a totally rational response to threats to burn down her house, kill her parents and poison her children with cyanide. Indeed, given the protective imperative of dominant discourses of motherhood, to face such actions calmly could be considered irrational, even perhaps insane. However, as she recalls,

It took me two and a half years to get custody of my children! And I was so angry. I acted angry, I showed my anger, so it made me look like I was an unfit mother, 'cause I showed anger. I started crying. I was yelling. I was angry. So when the lawyer took me out and explained to me that I was making it look like I was an unfit mother, because you're angry. So I was showing anger. I said "what do you expect?" I really did you know...I was angry. So I had to go back in there and be calm as anything, and agree and go along with them. To get custody of my sons (Julie).

So, in order to convince a court that she was a fit mother, Julie found herself explicitly forced to adopt an irrationally calm 'motherly' persona, with her anger seen as calling her mothering capabilities into question. As I have signaled repeatedly in the discussion above, many of the issues participants struggled with as they lived with violence and abuse related to feelings of personal failure and inadequacy. The majority of these 'personal failures' however are far better understood as failures to live up to the unreasonable, even at times impossible imperatives of dominant discourses of heterosexual coupledom, motherhood and matrimony. Regardless of this distinction though, such feelings of failure and inadequacy often translated into an intensely personally experienced emotional response of shame and/or embarrassment. Given that the vast majority of literature exploring shame locates its genesis within the shamed individual's recognition of some failing or inadequacy on their part, this is perhaps predictable; women feeling inadequate will 'naturally' experience a sense of shame. However, this project demonstrates that to see shame as a normal or natural response in this way creates a dangerous positioning for women experiencing violence in their intimate relationships. If shame is a response to failure to live up to purely socially constructed notions of gender, family, and/or mothering, and if the shame generated by these discourses serves to support ongoing abuse, then to present shame as a natural and normal response serves only to maintain or even reinforce a destructive status quo. Virtually all possibility of challenge is extinguished. Victims of abuse are faced with an invidious choice - either intensifying their efforts to be 'good mothers' or 'good wives' in order to please and/or pacify their abuser, or leaving and thus automatically fail in their

performance of these roles by abandoning their relationship and depriving their children of everyday life with their father.

Conclusion

What will be contained within this final section will be an account of my drawing together of those loose threads left trailing from my theoretical ‘unpicking’, a making explicit of the ways in which I have brought these ideas together. My discussion offers a contribution to several interrelated areas. It addresses the limitations of Thomas Scheff’s model of a shame-generated social bond from a feminist perspective, bringing accounts of women who have lived through abuse into relationship with his framing to explore the ways in which these social bonds may be both formed and experienced differently within specific contexts. It adds to debates around the meaning(s) of women’s experiences of abuse, using Erving Goffman’s theory of mortification of the self to explicate the shameful/shaming everyday processes constituting the experience of living through abuse. And finally it explores the problem of abstraction and emotional distance common to many sociological understandings of the emotions. I argue that this renders them inadequate in constructing emotionally representative accounts of intensely emotional experiences such as those generated for women by living through abuse in their intimate relationships and offer a potential way forward through the development of Elspeth Probyn’s feminist poststructuralist approach. These theoretical selections, along with the way they are related to each other and to intimate partner abuse, here, may require explanation. I acknowledge that what seems self-evident to me now may be somewhat opaque to others.

Throughout this project I have held tightly to a clear feminist politics, an awareness of gendered social power relations and an understanding that the abuse of women within intimate relationships is a gendered issue. The basis of these knowledges is extensively explored in the early chapters of this thesis and will not be rehearsed here, however the aspects I most valued about my initial philosophical and theoretical positioning remain important and worthy of review as I move my arguments towards a conclusion. These knowledges included an explanation to me of the history of the feminist ‘discovery’ of abuse against women, along with a conceptual language enabling me to begin questioning established understandings of violence against women. Just as importantly

they provided me with a legitimate theoretical and philosophical framing within which I could locate my earlier experiences working with victims of abuse within a feminist collective, thus enabling me to place myself within this research. Brought with me as I formulated my research, this particular set of knowledges have however undergone a change in shape and direction as I have absorbed the insights provided by feminist poststructuralists. The work of the women explicated in chapter five has given a more nuanced edge to the ways in which I understand gender relationships in contemporary New Zealand. Elspeth Probyn in particular gave me theoretical permission to take my participants and my own emotion seriously in a way I had not previously considered possible. This allowed me to move emotionality from the periphery of my academic attention, instead positioning it as a critical element of my understanding of the experience of living through (and writing about) abuse within intimate relationships.

So then, how did I get from ‘there’ to ‘here’? What, in both a theoretical and experiential sense, did I bring with me and what have I gathered up along the way? The methodological position from which I began my research and conducted data gathering can be readily identified as feminist standpoint. The theoretical version of this position as formulated by Dorothy Smith (1987) and further developed by Stanley and Wise (1990) seemed well suited to the shape of the project despite my initial unease and a sense of vulnerability around charges of essentialism and/or relativism often aimed at this perspective. These can be powerfully shameful/shaming critiques to someone becoming increasingly attracted to poststructuralist thought! However, once I realized that beginning from lived realities allowed exploration from an experiential base but did *not* mean wholehearted and uncritical adoption of any one specific set of understandings my discomfort eased. This particular reconciliation was vital. It gave me both the freedom and the permission to retain my commitment to a feminist politics while still enabling me to bring my participants’ accounts into conversation with a number of theoretical positions – both feminist and non-feminist.

One such position was that elaborated by Thomas Scheff, a sociologist working to develop a theory accounting for the connection of individuals to society. Scheff argues

that social bonds are absolutely crucial to societal functioning, contending that a need for a sense of cognitive and emotional connectedness is one of the most basic defining features of human social organisation. In developing his model Scheff proposes a theory of a social bond within which the experience of shame (including its many variants such as embarrassment, shyness, humiliation and so on) serves as an embodied signal warning of threats and/or damage to social bonds. Because emotional experience of this kind is not pleasant Scheff argues that the desire to avoid any shame related affect motivates individuals to adhere to socially established norms and thus maintain social stability.

Broadly speaking, I agree with his argument, but throughout this research my main interest has been the process or processes involved in constituting these bonds within the context of a concern with gendered intimate violence. I found Scheff's explanation a little unsatisfying in that while I wholeheartedly agreed that he was correct to foreground the working of shame, I felt his theoretical formulation ended at precisely the point at which I would need it to begin for the purpose of my project. To simply note that individuals adhere to social norms to avoid experiencing shame is insufficient to account for the multiple ways in which such adherence might produce social stability, and at what cost for those complying with socially established norms. In going beyond Scheff's insight into the social purpose of shame, it becomes necessary to enquire into why shame is or could be experienced in a particular context. Given that shame is generally attached to an awareness that one has been found wanting in some fundamental way, has failed to measure up to some vital standard, it is also important to ask exactly what such 'failures' consist of, how they are attached to particular standards, and how it is that the individual becomes aware that their shame signals a failure.

It is in exploration of Scheff's framing around these questions that a major gap in his work is revealed. While he acknowledges the existence of relations of power circulating throughout the social world, he does not account for these. Nor does he discuss in any detail how these social power relations might influence the constitution of either shame or social bonds. As noted above, I agree with Scheff's emphasis of the importance of social bonds and the suggestion that shame serves a warning function. However his lack

of recognition of the influence and workings of power relations means that his model fails to acknowledge that social bonds and any potential threats or damage to these would inevitably be experienced very differently depending upon an individual's positioning within the social world. In the context of this particular project, the specificity of gendered positioning is critical for understanding how it is that victims of violence experience shame as a consequence of their victimization.

Nonetheless Scheff's conceptualization of shame-generated bonds as the motivating mechanism of social functioning remained attractive to me. However, as I have signaled, to move his model into a shape politically and philosophically acceptable for a feminist project of this kind required me to bring it into relationship with a robust analysis of the power relations circulating throughout the social. To this end I introduced another set of voices, those of several feminist poststructuralists, to an already multi-vocal conversation. Drawing on the insights of Foucault, these women offered a flexibly sophisticated yet politically viable corrective to the emotional neutrality and disinterest with power plaguing Scheff's formulation.

The first of these points is particularly important because my own emotionality in relation to this project has been a key influence upon its ultimate shape and direction and I thank Elspeth Probyn for the courage of her writing which provided me with the inspiration and permission to bring this to the fore. With the help of feminist poststructuralists such as Probyn and their understandings of the constitution of self, identity, emotion and social power relations, along with the introduction of concepts of discourse and discursive practices, I began to assemble a conceptual picture of the highly specific form of social bonding experienced by victims of abuse within intimate relationships.

In terms of the ways in which these bonds are constituted, Scheff describes them as composed of several interrelated elements; attunement, communication, cooperation and emotion, all coming together to ratify each other's social positioning (the basis of an individual's social bonds). If this is achieved, society functions smoothly. If it is not, social alienation is the result. For women living through abuse however, concepts such as

communication, cooperation and attunement take on a particular set of meanings with little resemblance to the democratic and equitable concepts implied in Scheff's formulation. Communication enables an abusive partner to demonstrate and solidify their location as the one entitled to power and control within the relationship. Communication between victims and those outside the relationship can also operate as to solidify an abuser's right to power as victims come to understand that others can not or will not protect them, may implicitly blame them for the abuse, or may even consider it justified! Cooperation presents now as a demonstration of the efficacy of abuse, with victims 'cooperating' to maintain peace and safety and/or to hide the abusive character of the relationship from outsiders. Cooperation can also directly demonstrate their abusers' power to victims as it produces witnesses who turn away or fail to intervene in violent incidents. Attunement becomes a living experience of gendered entitlements to power and control, with each party displaying that they do indeed fully understand what they can and cannot do and what is or is not acceptable and/or possible within the relationship. Similarly the demonstration of attunement by others provides a signal to both victims and abusers that others also understand and, at least tacitly, accept the relationship as one in which the man is entitled to exercise power and control over his partner.

The emotional component of Scheff's framing is similarly shifted within the context of abusive intimate relationships with shame no longer a mere signal of bond threat but instead both a product and a form of reproducing abuse. Shame produces silences that are either employed directly by the abuser or operate socially to ensure victims' do not disclose their victimization. Those outside the relationship may also contribute to the production of shame, albeit not always deliberately or knowingly. This is especially noticeable in this project in relation to victims with children, when others attempt to evoke a sense of shame around their mothering in order to convince them to leave – the 'think what it's doing to the children' strategy! Those outside the relationship may also experience shame if they are unable and/or unwilling to intervene or protect the victim. Thus the social bonds ratified within abusive relationships are far from democratic and equitable but are instead a disturbingly illustrative example of the ways long standing relations of domination and subordination are ratified and thus perpetuated. Each party

implicitly ratifies the other's position. The abuser's violence ratifies them as dominant and powerful and the victim's responses ratify their position as subordinate and powerless.

Bringing an explicitly feminist account of these social bonds at work in the lives of a specific group of women – women living through abuse – provides a significant deepening of Scheff's conceptual framing. In line with socially constructed understandings of the self, my discussion has pointed out the ways in which our identities are formed through the multiple positions we each occupy as we go about our everyday lives. We simultaneously occupy positions as women, mothers, sisters, lawyers, students, beneficiaries, politicians and so on and we do so from locations of wealth or poverty and from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and so on. The ways in which we occupy the subject position offered – the everyday lived 'being' and 'doing' of these positions - and, more importantly, whether or not we do so in line with the dominant discourses, governs the constitution of our social positioning and thus the highly specific form of particular social bonds.

Of course victims may challenge their ratification and thus their subject positioning but this is a choice that comes unavoidably and inevitably attached to the risk of the shame and alienation of fractured social bonds in one way or another. It is a choice that remains open to us all but, as my analysis of participants' accounts suggests, for women living through violence and therefore already enmeshed in corrosive and shameful self-mortifying processes, it may not be an easy or even realistic 'choice' to enact. Mortification of the self, a conceptual account drawn from the work of another, much earlier sociologist of the emotions, Erving Goffman, provides this discussion with a powerful explanation of what happens within some abusive relationships which can dismantle and shame victims so systematically and thoroughly that their ability to respond to abuse in ways that proactively lead to its elimination.

In Goffman's account this systematic shaming involves a gradual erosion of a sense of self through processes of mortification that involve various shaming and shameful

actions. Goffman's description of the systematic use of control, shame and stigma by a powerful other to gradually dismantle an individual's sense of self offered grimly effective theoretical scaffolding for participants' accounts of abuse. Placing these ideas in the context of abusive intimate relationships provides a micro-focused account of the damaging force of many of the day-to-day interactions experienced by women living through abuse. Of course, the total institution within which Goffman's processes of mortification take place is constructed of bricks and mortar, thus allowing for a greater degree of regularity and isolation from outside interference, along with the ability to impose and enforce rigidly structured rules and regulations. For women living through abuse though this does not quite hold with most remaining connected to and a part of the wider social world and therefore exposed to the influences of others outside the relationship. In part the impact of this difference was reflected in participants' accounts of fluctuation, unsteadiness and unpredictability in the mortifying process, with partners apparently compensating for a lack of total control by ensuring an environment of ongoing and destabilizing confusion.

Appropriation of concepts from the work of Erving Goffman was a conflicted process from a feminist perspective. His texts, even from a sympathetic and generous reading, unmistakably reflect a white middleclass male view of the world and are peppered with instances of sexism, racism and class blindness, making his addition to my theoretical conversation uncomfortable at times. He was nonetheless an important contributor, enabling me to develop an account of women's abuse within intimate relationships as a form of institutionalized mortification of the self, a mortifying process acted out though a controlling abusive partner within the emotional confines of intimate partnership, rather than by an attendant within the brick walls of a mental asylum.

Taking more account of the discursive work undertaken by feminist women writers, the mortifying processes experienced by women living through abuse is seen to take place within a specific social context created through the constitutive power of dominant discourses of gender, heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood which work to shape the lives of individual women. Our participation in these discourses is

unavoidable as it is through this participation that our identities and our bonds to the social are constituted. The exact shape of our participation is amenable to some degree of individual choice and control, but only within closely patrolled parameters and with the proviso that should we stray too far from the norm we must be prepared to accept the material and emotional consequences.

Because of the specific ways in which discourses of heterosexual coupledness, matrimony and motherhood currently operate within Aotearoa New Zealand and the shape of the discursive practices they support and perpetuate, the result is the constitution of a narrow range of tightly prescribed subject positions available to victims of intimate partner abuse. By virtue of their position within an abusive relationship, victims will find themselves positioned within a range of stigmatized and undesirable discursively produced identities which simultaneously constrain and enable their ability to maintain secure social bonds, but in an intensely conflicted and contradictory fashion. As noted earlier, our social bonds are dependant upon the ways in which we occupy the various subject positions open to us. If we 'do' our identities in accordance with dominant constructions of these, then our bonds remain unthreatened. If we do not, then our bonds are at risk of damage, producing a sense of shame around our 'failure'. How then does this play out in relation to the subject positions occupied by women living through abuse?

To begin with, even positioning as a victim can be a fraught proposition. Women can be 'bad' victims if they do not conform to dominant understandings of victims as passive, sad and helpless. They may find themselves positioned as 'bad' or even 'unfit' mothers if they are seen to expose their children to abuse and violence; 'good mothers' protect and nurture their children. They may find themselves positioned as 'bad' mothers if they end the relationship and destroy the nuclear family; 'good' mothers preserve relationships, especially father/child relationships. Outsiders may position them as 'bad' or 'failed' wives/partners simply because they have suffered abuse; 'good' wives/partners would not receive such treatment. Because victims of abuse themselves participate in these same discourses, they may well position themselves in similar ways or at the least not actively contest their positioning by others. Of course women can (and some participants did) at

times refuse to occupy any and all of these stigmatized positions, although as participants suggested many times, doing so in itself produced negative consequences, creating barriers to help, support and protection.

For women living through abuse, already battered by ongoing processes of mortification of the self, this can make any attempt to shed stigmatized and shameful positioning an extremely hazardous and complicated undertaking, promising little more than added failure, the attribution of further stigmatized identities and yet more shame. For instance, women who blunt their experiences of abuse through self medication with alcohol and/or drugs may find themselves positioned not only as unfit mothers, but as substance abusers too. Women who fight back may be positioned as aggressive and violent, thus offending against dominant discourses of gender, either disqualifying themselves as victims (victims are passive and helpless) or finding themselves constituted as suffering from some form of mental illness (violence and aggression in women is generally seen as evidence of pathology). Women's emotionality also positions them, with evidence of anger used to constitute them as unstable and unfit to mother. Even responses to shame, for instance concealing abuse and/or protecting their abuser, can constitute them as not really wanting or needing help in line with earlier constructions of abused women as masochistic or as somehow deserving of the abusive punishment through which they are victimized.

Elsbeth Probyn argues that shame is, or at least can be productive, suggesting that shame, if invoked in a careful and respectful way, has the potential to produce positive challenge and questioning around issues of social justice. I agree. But in the context of abuse within intimate relationships this is a 'product' that must be treated with caution and subjected to rigorous questioning. What precisely is being produced when abused women experience shame? The outcome participants' experienced as these various discursive positions coalesce around a core of perceived shame and failure is the production and perpetuation of social bonds based on institutionalized relations of domination and subordination between abusers and their victims.

Throughout this discussion I have provided an explicit detailing of the way in which the production of shame for victims of intimate abuse occurs. Shame produces subject positions for women living through violence that are impossible to occupy, at least with any degree of personal safety, comfort or coherence. This 'product' varies according to the individual circumstances of each woman with their marital and/or parental status, their economic resources and so on working to either constrain or enable the ways in which they are able to position themselves. I have demonstrated that there are indeed material consequences attached to the ways women experience the shame of living through violence and that these work in an uneven way depending upon their positioning within various discursively constituted social formations. Identification of the extent of these differences is however beyond the scope of this particular project but it is my hope that this research signals a way forward. I believe that this research establishes that we must be wary of all proposed remedies to the abuse of women which do not include acknowledgement of the need to also work towards wider issues of gender inequity.

Ironically this last point returns me virtually full circle to my original research agenda; the search for what it was that meant that some women and not others possessed the resilience to permanently remove abuse from their lives. I still think that my pragmatic direction at that time was well-founded. It remains vitally important that we keep exploring ways to keep women and children safe from abuse within their most intimate relationships, but this research suggests that the focus of these efforts requires adjustment. Concepts such as resilience are attractive, especially to policy makers and service providers. Without question it is far easier to work towards strengthening individuals and their families, to help provide them with the personal resources necessary to cope with pain and trauma. This means dealing with everyday demands. It means social service agencies working to ensure that families are housed and fed. It means public funding of mental health services, for instance counseling and/or pharmaceutical remedies, to address psychological damage and/or teach emotional and psychological coping skills. In short, it means continuing to concentrate our efforts on the amelioration of the *effects* of abuse, helping individual women and their families to deal with the aftermath of violence. In fostering notions of family and individual resilience we

inevitably position ourselves reactively. This consumes our energy and attention, distracting our notice from those things which enable ongoing systemic abuse – the inequitable gendered social power relations constituting the social world we inhabit. I am not for one moment suggesting that we turn away from current efforts to make the lives of abused women and their families safer and more survivable. These remain vital. I am however arguing that demand for these supportive efforts will only continue to grow unless we seriously attend to the ways in which particular formations of social power operate to position individual women and their families. As suggested by Mary Koss (2000), this implies taking seriously the notion of social, rather than individual responsibility; the suggestion that eradicating abuse of women within their intimate relationships relies heavily upon social, rather than individual change.

As I have demonstrated throughout this research, the subject positions available to women living through abuse are complex and contradictory. By virtue of the actions of others, the perpetrators of abuse and many of those outside the abusive relationship, these women are positioned to fail. Their inability to ‘do’ motherhood or intimate partnership in line with dominant discourses of mothering and relationships (because these simply cannot be achieved within an abusive context) opens them to the debilitating effects of shame. Shame, both actual and threatened, promotes silence, isolation and dangerous private spaces as women seek to protect themselves from its painful experience. It is crucial that we promote the availability of discursive positioning for women living through abuse which offers non-shaming and realistic choices, rather than demand the display of resilience in the face of manifestly unjust and inequitable circumstances.

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Moving On: Emotional Resilience in Survivors of Domestic Abuse

INFORMATION SHEET

What the Research is About.

The research aims to gather the stories of survivors of abusive domestic violence who have maintained a life free of violence and abuse for at least 2 years. It will focus mainly on the emotional processes and the relationships/friendships of abuse survivors. It is hoped that, by talking to women who have already made the shift away from abuse, information will be found that is likely to encourage women currently in abusive situations to make the same move.

A great deal of current research concerning domestic abuse is concentrated on women who are unable to stop or escape the abuse in their lives and remain trapped in a cycle of violence. In contrast to such an approach, this project aims to highlight stories of achievement and success.

Who Can Participate?

Anyone who has previously experienced an abusive and/or violent relationship but who has been living free from abuse for at least the past 2 years.

Your Involvement

If you agree to be involved in the research you will be asked to take part in 2 one-to-one interviews with myself at a time and place most convenient for you. You are invited to include any whanau or family members you might like to be at the interview - children are very welcome.

The two interviews will be held around 4 to 6 months apart and should take between an hour and an hour and a half each. If you agree, the interview will be taped, to be transcribed later.

Once the interview is transcribed (and only if you agree) a copy of your transcript will be given back to you so that you can check that everything is accurate. At the same time you will be able to take out anything that you don't want included. If you choose not to have your interview taped you will be given the opportunity to check any notes made by me during your interview

The interviews will be informal, consisting of conversations about what it feels like and means to you to have moved from an abusive and/or violent relationship to a life free of abuse. As a part of this, I would like to hear about your relationships with others (mainly those not directly connected with the abuse you experienced), both at the time you left and now. I must stress though that you need only talk about issues and events that you are comfortable sharing with me.

It is expected that the total time commitment for you if you agree to take part will be around 5 hours – about 2 ½ hours for each interview. This includes both interviews and time spent checking your transcripts.

Your Rights as a Participant

- Decline to participate or to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason This includes the right to withdraw following the first interview if I do not wish to continue
- Refuse to answer any question if this is my choice
- Agree or disagree to my interview being taped
- Ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- Confidentiality of any information provided to the researcher and that I will not be able to be identified in reports arising from the study
- Be given access to a transcript of my interview to amend and/or to delete any part of the transcript that I do not want used in the study
- Decide on the disposal of audio-tapes and transcripts following completion of the study.
- A copy of a summary report of the research results

Confidentiality

No information which could personally identify participants will be used in any written material arising from this research. The identity of participants will only be known to the researcher. The ability of participants to remove from transcripts any information they do

not wish to be included in the research is an additional protection of participant confidentiality.

All interview tapes and transcripts will be stored securely in a locked cabinet accessible only by the researcher. Tapes and transcripts will not be labeled with participants' names but will be coded with a unique identifier known only to the researcher. Should a third person be employed to transcribe interview tapes, that person will be subject to a confidentiality agreement. At the completion of the project all information provided by participants will be destroyed. Participants will be offered the option of having their audio-tapes returned to them or destroyed by the researcher.

Appendix B
Participant consent form

**Moving On:
Emotional Resilience in Survivors of Domestic Abuse**

CONSENT FORM

I have read and I understand the information sheet for participants in this research. I understand that as a participant in this research I have the rights listed in the Information Sheet.

I have had the opportunity to discuss this research. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

I understand that taking part in this research is my choice and that I may withdraw at any time with no questions asked.

I understand that my participation in this research is confidential and that I will not be identified in any reports arising from this research.

I have had time to consider whether to take part.

I know who to contact if I have any questions about the project.

As a participant in this research I understand that I have the right to:

- Decline to participate or to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. This includes the right to withdraw following the first interview if I do not wish to continue
- Refuse to answer any question if this is my choice
- Agree or disagree to my interview being taped
- Ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- Confidentiality of any information provided to the researcher and that I will not be able to be identified in reports arising from the research

- Be given access to a transcript of my interview to amend and/or to delete any part of the transcript that I do not want used in the research
- Decide on the disposal of audio-tapes and transcripts following completion of the research
- A copy of a summary report of the research results if desired

I hereby consent to take part in this study.
Print full name

I Agree/ Do Not Agree to my interview being audio-taped
(Please circle)

.....
Signature

.....
Date

Moving on: Emotional resilience in survivors of domestic abuse

Preliminaries:

- Thanks for agreeing to participate
- Explanation of the study
- Solicit and respond to participant questions
- Review participant rights
- Complete consent process

Key questions:

- 1) Can you tell me about your relationship and how you came to decide that you couldn't live with the abuse any longer/
- 2) Why do you think you didn't come to this decision earlier?
- 3) Had you made previous attempts to leave or stop the abuse?
- 4) Can you tell me about the ending of the abusive relationship and about your feelings over the first few days after this?
- 5) What support did you have over this time?
- 6) Looking back on this time, what are the feelings that stand out most in your memory now?
- 7) Are there any events that occurred then that stand out as particularly important now?
- 8) If you compare your life now to the way it was before, what has leaving the relationship meant for you?
- 9) What are the most important things that have changed since then?
- 10) What do you think it is that makes it possible for you to maintain an abuse-free lifestyle now?
- 11) Can you tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you agreed to participate in this research?
- 12) Gather demographic information if this has not emerged through the course of the interview.