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Women's Everyday Resistance to Intimate Partner Violence

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for a

Master of Science

in Health Psychology

At Massey University

Aotearoa

Alice Black

2018

Abstract

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

Acknowledgements

To all the women who participated in my study, thank you for making the time and space to share your stories, humour, and wisdom with me. I hope I have reflected your strength and resilience adequately in my work. I have learned more from you than can be expressed in this thesis.

To Poli and the staff at Te Whakaruruhau, thank you for welcoming me so warmly and sharing your invaluable knowledge. Poli, your guidance and humour have been hugely appreciated and your continuing work supporting whānau in Aotearoa is an inspiration.

To my amazing supervisors, Darrin Hodgetts and Pita King-thank you for everything you have done to make this possible. I'm so grateful for your ongoing encouragement, support, feedback and reassuring emails. Your honest approach to research and life more generally has been a breath of fresh air and made this whole process so much less scary. I promise I'll think about the PhD.

To all my lovely friends (but especially Isabel and Juliet), thank you for providing the constant emotional support and encouragement I needed to see this through. Whether it was through coffee dates, memes, hugs, or reading over my work, every little bit helped. To Bridget, your tireless advocacy and unapologetic approach to social justice has helped me develop into the person I am today. To my Mum, the strongest woman I know, thank you for everything you've done for me throughout this thesis and throughout my life. I couldn't have done this without your endless support and love. Henry, thanks for saying, "we'll look back on this and laugh" when I was at my most stressed. To James and Josh, thank you for being there.

Lastly, to my friend Theo, I bet you never thought I'd finish this, hey? Well, joke's on you, mate, I did.

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