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Telling lives: Children's stories of hope, loss, love, and violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

This is a descriptive, exploratory study of children's experiences and understandings of domestic violence in the Manawatu region of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It responds to the historical absence of children in anthropological research and in studies of domestic violence.

The research is based on data gathered through group activities and discussions with children, five to twelve years old, in a domestic violence education and support group. A series of life history interviews was also undertaken.

The study uncovers a myriad of ways that children make sense of domestic violence; incorporate their experiences of domestic violence into their identities; and manipulate, adapt, disrupt, or reproduce cultural knowledge about domestic violence in their own lives and relationships. Special focus is given to the role of helping or compassionate social relationships in children's lives, not only for the physical safety of children but also for their ability to cope with domestic violence and bounce back from other hardships in life. The children's narratives shared in this study have practical implications for domestic violence service delivery in New Zealand, as well as applied research with children more generally. The study also highlights children's capacities for powerful observations, insights, and critical analysis.

The thesis itself incorporates many different modes of data (re-)presentation, including poetry, drama, vignettes, and experiments with narrative voice and researcher reflexivity. The use of these literary forms helps to weave multiple perspectives into the thesis, allowing participants to speak for themselves. It also assists in producing an engaging and accessible account of children's lives, which *shows* or *represents* lived experience, an alternative to the large number of statistical analyses that exist in the literature on domestic violence.

Dedication

This research would have been entirely different if Chantelle had not been present at every initial programme interview and session of the Dragonflies Tamariki Programme. For your practical assistance, your wisdom, and your keen interest in this work, Chantelle, I am extremely fortunate. For the kind of friendship we shared over the course of our work together—an uncommon and intimate connection of spirit—I am immensely grateful. This work is as much yours as it is mine.

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