

**The legacy of domestic violence:
How the dynamics of abuse continue
beyond separation**

Submitted by

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Abstract

In Australia, social and legal trends towards shared parenting after separation coincide with statistics conveying domestic violence as the single biggest health risk to women of reproductive age (UNPFR, 2005). Such statistics rely on the reporting of physical violence, yet there is a growing recognition that domestic violence is best conceptualised as a pattern of coercive control (Stark, 2007) that may include only minor, if any, physical violence (Johnson, 2008). An important concern for the Australian social work profession should be a coherent ability to identify and respond to domestic violence in order to ensure the protection of women and children in the trend towards shared-parenting post separation. This thesis explored women's experiences of post-separation shared parenting arrangements and the aspects of abuse which persisted beyond separation. The study was conducted from a feminist standpoint. Thirty (30) women were recruited using non-probability purposive and snowballing sampling procedures. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews explored their pre- and post-separation experiences of abuse from the fathers of the children. This data was then thematically analysed.

The findings of this study show that there was a commonality of dynamics underlying the relationship each woman had with the father of their children. Despite the women's resistance, these dynamics gave rise to shared experiences of oppression both pre- and post-separation. The dynamics are conceptualised as a web of abuse emanating from their partners' attitudinal and behavioural style. A parallel is drawn between the web of abuse and a process of colonisation. Colonisation helps clarify the relentless and pervasive pattern of boundary violations experienced by the women both pre- and post-separation. It also explains the extent of the women's post-separation difficulties irrespective of the presence, form or intensity of shared parenting arrangements. The consequences of conceptualising domestic violence independently of physical violence and as a colonising process are discussed with regard to the implications for counselling, research, the socio-legal response, and social work knowledge and practice. A conclusion drawn from this study suggests that critical to the anti-oppressive practice of social workers in the field of domestic violence is their ability to detect and disrupt colonising attitudes and behaviours. Collusion with such attitudes and behaviours seriously undermines the value of our profession for women and children who are at risk of abuse.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

As a social worker in Tasmania, Australia, I have been employed as a counsellor in an agency where a high percentage of my case load was women with children who were in private or court mandated post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Commonly, the women and the children were in distress over these arrangements. The women inevitably described a relationship with their ex-partners where they had been subjected to a pattern of abuse and sometimes violence. I became increasingly concerned at what I perceived as a very nebulous socio-legal understanding of domestic violence and the way it hinged on physical violence. It was also unclear to the women when a pattern of abuse could be identified and responded to as domestic violence. This was especially when the pattern did not include major incidents of physical violence or those that matched legal criteria and evidentiary requirements. I observed an ongoing pattern of abuse post-separation that impacted on the women's and children's ability to restore their lives, yet a socio-legal minimisation of the difficulties these women had with shared parenting arrangements.

This study is the result of these concerns. It explores women's experience of abuse pre-separation and the links with their post-separation shared parenting issues. I consider this particularly significant to the social work profession in Australia given the controversial social and legal trends towards shared parenting post-separation. There is also increasing evidence that domestic violence constitutes the greatest risk to the health of women in Australia of reproductive age (UNPFR, 2005). It seems critical that the social work profession develops a coherent ability to identify and respond to domestic violence. Without this understanding, it cannot adequately address the issues that arise for a significant number of women and their children in the trend towards shared parenting post-separation.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to outline the reason for and the structure of this research project. I begin with an introduction to the research problem and draw attention to two recent Australian tragedies involving the deaths of children at the hands of parents in post-separation shared parenting arrangements. I describe the

history of the contemporary shared parenting laws and address the significance to women in post-separation parenting arrangements of the current socio-legal conceptualisation and response to domestic violence. This is followed by the aims and central research question for this study and a summary of the study's methodology. I then present sections that focus on the key concepts underpinning the study, a description of the participants and a summary of the findings. Finally, I outline the overall structure of the study.

The Research Problem

A victim of harassment or assault by a stranger would never be expected to have an ongoing relationship with her perpetrator. The suggestion would be seen as absurd in the context of stranger violence. It is just as unthinkable to require parents to agree and cooperate, or to ensure frequent and continuing contact with both parents, when there has been domestic violence; however courts too often do not make that distinction. Every day, parents who are victims of violence are required to send their children to be with their abuser... (Kleinman, 2004, p. 121).

Kleinman (2004) outlines some of the key problems within the Australian and international research regarding the appropriate socio-legal response to two contentious issues: post-separation parenting arrangements and domestic violence. As separate issues, they raise much controversy and debate which appears to escalate where they merge in family breakdown. There are competing discourses on both the prevalence and nature of domestic violence and the impact on the post-separation parenting experiences of women with children. Specifically, the 'enormous chasm between the fundamental beliefs of father's rights advocates and domestic violence advocates' (Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson, 2003, p. 12) is clear within the Australian and international research.

Two recent tragedies draw attention to the need to bridge these 'diametrically opposed viewpoints' (Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson, 2003, p. 13) and clearly map how these two issues can overlap in the lives of women with children in post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Although there are considerable differences between

the stories, these do not obscure the common aspects of post-separation shared parenting experiences in both.

The first tragedy was a murder suicide. Unnoticed and in the early hours of 4 June 2008, Gabriela Garcia strapped 22-month-old Oliver, her only son, to her chest. She covered his eyes with a bandage, climbed onto a milk crate and jumped from Melbourne's West Gate Bridge. All the indications were that it was well planned. She had signed her will on 2 June 2008 and left clear instructions for the funeral arrangements. In suicide notes she had written that she feared losing custody of her son to his father, Daniel Allen, with whom she was in a private post-separation shared parenting arrangement. Her parents had found a note on their front door telling them it was not their fault and that 'our blood is on his hands' (Roberts & Higgenbottom, 2009).

This story generated insignificant media response compared to the worldwide coverage given to the second story. On 29 January this year, a four-year-old girl, Darcey Freeman, was also thrown from Melbourne's West Gate Bridge, but by her father and in full view of rush-hour traffic. Witnesses described how Arthur Freeman stopped his car, unbuckled Darcey, took her to the railings, lifted her over and let her go. Arthur and his wife, Peta, had separated two years earlier, and cared for their three children under court ordered shared parenting arrangements. The day before, they had come to an agreement about the custody of their three children. It is alleged that Arthur was given less time than he wanted (Overington, 2009c).

To the casual observer, these deaths may seem a sad reflection of mental illness or the distress inherent in family breakdown. The Victorian coroner found that Gabriela's mental state was deteriorating in the final weeks of her life, although she had no history of mental illness and had not consulted her doctor regarding mental health issues (Rout, 2009a). Freeman was later diagnosed as being in an acute psychiatric state and unfit for interview (Hagen, 2009) and there were concerns he was suicidal (Petrie, Silvester & Kissane, 2009). However, speculation has also been rife in the media as to the nature of Arthur Freeman's relationship with Peta Barnes.

Interestingly, there has been little speculation around Gabriela's relationship with Daniel. Whereas Oliver died at the hands of his mother, who took her own life as well, and Darcey died at the hands of her father, a connection between the two mothers of the children appeared to be a great concern over the role of the father in the children's lives. Of relevance to this study is a sense of their powerlessness to protect their children despite these concerns. This is particularly the case given the recent amendments to family law on post-separation shared parenting and the difficulty in detecting and disrupting the effects of domestic violence on shared parenting arrangements.

Although Gabriela apparently made no allegations of violence by Daniel and detectives allegedly declared the shared custody arrangements were amicable (Rout, 2009b) there were specific indications that Gabriela was uneasy. She apparently believed that Daniel wanted to claim full custody, was poisoning Oliver's mind against her as well as teaching him objectionable and abhorrent things about her. She had asked Daniel to pick Oliver up from her parents rather than her own house (Rout, 2009b). However, under the Family Law Act in Australia, she had no viable reason not to engage in the shared parenting of Oliver with Daniel.

There were also indications in the media and by the Freeman family that Peta may have made allegations of violence by Arthur. Relatives of the Freeman children claimed they tried to draw attention to the authorities about their fears for the children's safety while with their father and believed the judicial system failed them (Overington, 2009a). 'Various authorities have been made aware of our fear for the safety of the children, and unfortunately no one would listen', Darcey's uncle claimed (Anderson, 2009). Yet the law firm which acted for Arthur described him as a 'devoted and loving father... not anything anyone could have predicted would happen' (Petrie, Silvester & Kissane, 2009).

These indications of unease for both Peta and Gabriela were both seen and expressed in the media in different ways. Peta's story received wide coverage and there was a public outcry towards Darcey's death. An 'avalanche of complaints' (Overington,

2009a) was received from the general public and services within the domestic violence sector regarding the way in which the reforms to family law put women and children at risk of being forced into post-separation relationships with ex-partners who used violence. Overington (2009a) reports that Richard Chisholm (a former Family Court judge) will conduct a review of the way allegations of domestic violence are responded to by the Family Court: 'I will be interested to try and find out whether that presumption of shared parenting has any connection with family violence' (Nader, 2009). Indeed, the Rudd government cites the case of Darcey Freeman as being one of the catalysts for the need to change. Chisholm is reported as stating he would like to speak with Darcey's mother, Peta Barnes: 'The questions I will be looking at will be whether there was some way the system might have predicted that something like that was going to happen, or whether the system fell short' (Packham, 2009).

By contrast, Gabriela's story did not receive major media coverage. However, it also suggests questions for further investigation. This story raises the issue of how domestic violence is conceptualised and suggests that the experience of physical violence and fears for the physical safety of the children is only one face of domestic violence. For women such as Gabriela, a narrow focus on physical violence may well obscure other more subtle experiences of domestic violence, leaving women and their children vulnerable when forced into shared parenting arrangements post-separation.

Once the possibility of domestic violence was introduced as a factor in Darcey's death, the crossfire in the media escalated between advocates for fathers' rights and representatives from domestic violence services. NSW Acting Attorney-General Verity Firth pointed out the difficulties posed by the new shared parenting laws in balancing the rights of children to relationship with both parents yet protecting them from violence. She was concerned that: '... a very strong pro-contact culture has arisen even where the safety of children couldn't be guaranteed...' (Overington, 2009b). In contrast, Sue Price, of the Men's Rights Agency, argued that although the new shared parenting laws provided more time for divorced fathers with their children, these laws were in danger of being changed by Rudd's cabinet: '... there are

a number of women who are well and truly indoctrinated in a 1970s feminist movement background, and they do not value the role of men in society. [Tanya] Plibersek pushes domestic violence based on incorrect data ... the fact is that children are at far greater risk from their mothers ...' (Price, cited in Overington, 2009b).

It is clear that the determination of the child's best interests in post-separation shared parenting disputes currently exists within a 'highly charged and politicised context' (Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson, 2003, p. 13). This context has its roots both in the history of family law in Australia and in the competing discourses on the prevalence and the actual nature of domestic violence.

History of the shared parenting laws

The current shared parenting laws were introduced by the Howard Government in 2006 and are the culmination of the socio-legal response to marriage, divorce and custody since Australia was first settled. With Western common law based on canon or church law, gender discrimination became noticeably entrenched in government power structures and the economy. Feminist legal scholars have pointed out that women were inadequately protected in the legal arena by laws that perpetuated patriarchy and legitimised the domination of men (Scutt, 1990). Lake (1999) pointed out that prior to the 20th century, women lacked basic political and civil rights. As well as being legally disabled, they were rendered economically dependent through the inability to survive on the wages in the lower occupations to which women were permitted. Marrying in order to survive also meant the loss of property and custody rights (Lake, 1999). Men were granted legal immunity for physically assaulting or raping their wives (Scutt, 1990). Divorce was therefore rare, with an emphasis on who was at fault and the need to reform divorce law did not reach the political agenda until the latter half of the 20th century (Nicholson & Harrison, 2000).

By the 1970s, Australia, as with most Western industrialised countries, was forced to consider issues of gender inequity and the legal and societal subordination of women (Gilmore, 2002). Feminist legal scholars began to insist that motherhood 'should not lock women into a degrading dependence on men' (Lake, 1999, p. 86). The

introduction of ‘no fault’ divorce in 1975 by the Whitlam Government increased the divorce and separation rate significantly (Chisholm, 2005). At the same time, the roles of mothers and fathers were changing in family life and workforce participation, creating different expectations and responsibilities (Smyth, 2003). There was intense public debate about what was equitable family law and post-separation parenting arrangements (Chisholm, 2005).

When the Family Law Court of Australia commenced in 1976, the influential research at that time was focused on the adverse consequences to children of maternal absence. This typically resulted in a framework of custody for women and access for fathers (Funder, 1991; Parkinson & Smyth, 2003). In 1995, however, family law was influenced by research that brought to light how children were affected by the absence of a father, and thus the importance of maintaining contact with both parents post-separation (Bann & Rhoades, 2002). The custody framework was replaced with a shared parenting regime. Separated parents were encouraged to refrain from a ‘commodification’ of children (Maloney, 2001, p. 64). Parental responsibility was emphasised (Chisholm, 2001) with the best interests of the child overriding parental rights. The focus moved to the rights of children, where appropriate, to have an ‘ongoing knowledge of and relationship with both parents’ (Maloney, 2001, p. 64). The terms ‘residence’ and ‘contact’ replaced ‘custody’ to encourage equal parental status, for under the previous law it was the custodial parent who retained most, if not all, of the legal authority over a child (Dewar & Parker, 1999, p.1).

In 2003, the debate around post-separation parenting intensified in response to further attempts by the Federal Government to balance competing claims for more equitable arrangements. One of these claims was from father’s rights groups of gender bias in law and the courts against fathers. They argued that the family law system failed to implement the shared parenting directive of the 1995 reform (Flood, 2003). These groups lobbied for the introduction of a rebuttable presumption of joint custody and equal parenting time following family breakdown (Flood, 2003). Competing claims were proposed by a wide range of organisations such as the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Child Support Agency, the Attorney General’s Department,

domestic violence services, women's support services and child protection agencies (Rhoades & Boyd, 2004). They presented extensive submissions detailing the empirical evidence that argued against joint custody. Roxon (2005) notes that the common themes of these submissions were that the reforms:

1. Were premised on the iniquitous assumption that only non-resident parents (fathers) had suffered poor outcomes;
2. Presented an unbalanced solution which was particularly at the expense of mothers and children where there was a context of domestic violence; and
3. Acknowledged the rights but not the responsibilities of fathers (Roxon, 2005).

A further influence in this debate was the significant number of empirical studies investigating divorce and family life in the last decade, which were not available to the Federal Government for the 1995 reforms (Rhoades & Boyd, 2004). Such was the intensity of the debate that many submissions by organisations or individuals opposing the changes to the law were made anonymously in order to avoid hate mail and threats of violence (Rhoades & Boyd, 2004). Chief Justice of the Australian Family Court, Alistair Nicholson, expressed concerns about the proposal of father's rights groups:

To many of these people, women's emancipation has either not occurred, or should not have done so... a feature of their rhetoric is a complete absence of concern for children other than as objects of their rights and entitlements... they frequently engage in the grossest form of harassment of their former partners and their children (cited in Milburn, 1998).

The outcomes from this debate included a number of changes to family law. While the children's best interests remained the ultimate determinant of post-separation parenting arrangements, the terms 'residence' and 'contact' were replaced with the term of 'parenting time' (Rhoades & Boyd, 2004). The presumption for equal time was rejected but the presumption of joint responsibility was accepted. This suggests that post-separation both parents should have input into major decisions regarding the children, irrespective of the amount of time each parent has with the child. If there was proven family violence or child abuse, there was a clear presumption against

shared parental responsibility. However, this does not apply for families where there is entrenched conflict or substance abuse (Shared Parental Responsibility Bill, 2005).

Although providing proof of family violence would seem fair in light of the possibility of false allegations, not all domestic violence can be proven. Opponents of father's rights groups are concerned that in trying to address the legitimate concerns of fathers who would like more involvement with their children, the reforms create a bias against mothers, particularly in cases involving domestic violence (DVIRC, 2004; Roxon, 2005). They refer to the extensive attention given to the concerns of father's rights groups regarding legal remedies for 'difficult and uncooperative' mothers. Critics also refer to the provision of punitive mechanisms for mothers who use frivolous or false allegations of violence (Saffron, 2005) and argue that there is clear evidence in Australian research that false allegations are rare (Kaye & Tolmie, 2004) and the majority of frivolous complaints in apprehended violence orders are in fact initiated by men against their female partners (Todd, 1994).

The trigger for an intervention to protect women experiencing domestic violence depends on their ability to prove incidents of physical violence. Under these new laws, a mother can expect to pay court costs for raising allegations of violence without adequate proof. The Family Court's Chief Justice, Diana Bryant, has recently acknowledged that women fear these measures and do not want to be seen as hostile towards their ex-partner lest they lose custody of their children (Overington, 2009c).

Further, critics argue that the needs of non-resident fathers are elevated at the expense of the needs of resident mothers dealing with difficult, absent or neglectful fathers. The failure of the father to maintain contact attracts no legal sanction in court order enforcement (Rhoades, 2002). This allows the father the right to exert a degree of control over the resident parent without ensuring responsibility towards the care of the child as well, regardless of how much the child would like a relationship with the father (Dewar & Parker, 1999). Nordborg (1997, cited in Eriksson and Hester, 2001) refers to this as a 'lawless space' that implies fatherhood is voluntary, despite the child's right to contact under Australian family law.

The reforms have also been criticised for neglecting to address the evidence in Australia that domestic violence is underreported by women and the Family Law Act and the Family Court are unable to protect mothers and children from violence and oppression post-separation (Roxon, 2005). McInnes (2001, p. 1) argues that the reforms may lead to the withdrawal of equal and sufficient attention from the ‘need for gendered violence to be recognised as a significant driver of poverty, isolation and stress in single mother households, impacting adversely on both mothers and children’.

In sum, critics believe that current Australian family law focuses on the rights of the father rather than his responsibility and weakens the mother’s legal and negotiating position with regard to children (Dewar & Parker, 1999). Irrespective of domestic violence, this signals a return to ‘motherhood locking women into a degrading dependence on men’ (Lake, 1999, p. 86).

The socio-legal response to domestic violence

It can be argued that the impact of recent changes to family law and shared parenting is further exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. The United Nations Population Fund released a report on 20 October, 2005, stating that globally, the most widespread and socially tolerated human rights violation was gender-based violence. In Australia, Canada and South Africa, the report declared, between 40–70 per cent of female murder victims were killed by their male partners (UNPFR, 2005, p. 66), indicating the extent to which some men use violence in relationships. Despite such statistics, the significance of domestic violence in family breakdown has often been disregarded by family courts, lawyers and service providers (Hart, 2004; Jaffe & Crooks, 2005). Hart (2004) notes that a significant number of women and children are at risk of being undifferentiated from the general population of parenting disputes that come before the Australian Family Law Court. They are also at risk of being confused with highly conflictual divorces

(Johnston, 1994) that are not necessarily characterised by the power imbalance, abuse and fear inherent to domestic violence.

The majority of data about the prevalence and impact of domestic violence, however, refers predominantly to reported incidents of physical violence, when in fact the research on domestic violence has consistently indicated that it is a much more complex phenomenon. Studies that define domestic violence as physical abuse are based on collecting information on discrete episodes. Stark notes that the ‘conventional definition of domestic violence has been adapted from criminal justice’, which considers crimes to be discrete acts (Stark, 2007, p. 86). Consequently, the legal language used to conceptualise domestic violence results in the protection of some women and not others. Stark (2007) describes the serious cost to women and children of this narrow definition, as it draws attention away from the aspects of domestic violence that are not part of such an incident/injury conceptualisation:

Viewing women through the prism of the incident specific and injury based definition of domestic violence has concealed its major components, dynamics and effects, including the fact that it is neither ‘domestic’ or primarily about ‘violence’ (Stark, 2007, p.10).

Research on the lived experience of women ‘turns the prevailing definition on its head’ by explaining domestic violence as more of a course of conduct crime and a chronic pattern of relating and behaving that traps women and denies them liberty and autonomy (Stark, 2007, p. 99). Rather than a crime of assault, Stark depicts domestic violence as a liberty crime (Stark, 2007, p. 13). He describes a pattern of coercive control within domestic violence that more resembles kidnapping or indentured servitude than assault. According to Johnson’s (2008) typology of domestic violence, such a pattern may not include any physical violence at all.

The feminist view is that the dynamics of domestic violence occur within the wider social and political control of women (Radford & Hester, 2006) and depict a range of coercive behaviours reminiscent of the ‘constraints implicit in the normative enactment of gender roles’ (Stark, 2007, p. 39). The variety of language used to

conceptualise domestic violence has had the effect of, ‘including, excluding or emphasising different aspects of the problem’ (Radford & Hester, 2006, p.7) and therefore including or excluding women’s experiences. As Macdonald states, ‘when we can understand that definitions are debated and change over time, we can critically evaluate those that underpin any particular piece of work’ (Macdonald, 1998, p. 4). This is also the case for evaluating socio-legal responses towards and policies for domestic violence.

The challenges of defining domestic violence suggest that an unknown percentage of women and children in Australia are rendered vulnerable in post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Within the new shared parenting laws, the detection of domestic violence is still based on evidence of physical or sexual abuse. This places women in a difficult position if they do not feel safe to report it, are unable to prove it, or have experienced episodes of physical or sexual violence which do not match the legal criteria or evidentiary requirements. For those women who do report physical or sexual violence, research suggests that legal authentication and protection is notoriously difficult to achieve pre- or post-separation (Humphries & Thiara, 2002; Kaye, Stubbs & Tolmie, 2003b).

The deaths of Gabriela and Oliver Garcia and Darcey Freeman indicate the confusion inherent in defining and therefore responding to domestic violence, particularly within post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Attorney General Robert McClelland has asked for Darcey’s case to be reviewed, stating, ‘It is paramount that our family law system is capable of identifying and responding to violence ... we fail children who fall through the holes created by confusion and jurisdictional responsibilities...’ (Packham, 2009). However, Victorian State Attorney-General Rob Hulls argues for a broadening of the definition of domestic violence as in the state of Victoria ‘...to include economic, psychological and emotional abuse if a truly national approach was to be adopted...’ (Nader, 2009).

Clearly, until the ‘major components, dynamics and effects of domestic violence’ (Stark, 2007, p.10) are identified and the impact of these on post-separation shared

parenting arrangements is clarified, there remains an unknown percentage of women and children in Australia who may be at risk of further abuse. If domestic violence is a course of conduct crime as opposed to assault, as Stark has suggested, they are disadvantaged in post-separation shared parenting arrangements by a conceptualisation of domestic violence that focuses too heavily on the experience of physical violence.

It is thus the intention of this study to draw links between domestic violence and women's experience of post-separation shared parenting arrangements, without a reliance on physical violence. These links would prevent the needs of women and children being overlooked in a pro- contact culture and contribute to the formulation of more appropriate legal, therapeutic and social responses to post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

In this research, I specifically focus on women who identify with the broader conceptualisation of domestic violence referred to later in this chapter, whether or not they experienced physical violence. It is important to differentiate the focus of this research on domestic violence perpetrated by male partners toward their female partners, from the current emphasis on the more gender neutral concept of family violence, which focuses on violence between any member of the family including women's violence to men and children. Whereas there is no denying that such violence and other forms of oppression certainly exist and are just as worthy of concern, they do not necessarily 'dismantle the relevance of a gender analysis of violence' (Gilmore, 2002, p. 91). Although this study does not attempt to minimise the presence and importance of gender neutral family violence in the analysis of different forms of oppression in our society (Mullaly, 2002), it addresses and focuses in particular on domestic violence against women.

Research aims

The purpose of this study is to explore the links between women's experiences of domestic violence and their shared parenting experiences.

The aim is to highlight the implications of these links for women required to manage shared parenting arrangements with an ex-partner who used domestic violence.

Research questions

This inquiry was guided by the following research question:

- In a context of domestic violence, how do women experience post-separation shared parenting arrangements?

The subsidiary questions were:

- How do women experience abuse pre-separation?
- How do women experience the impact of pre-separation abuse?
- How do these experiences impact on women post-separation?

Summary of the study's methodology

My research is a qualitative, exploratory study conceptualised within a phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994) and informed by feminist standpoint (Harding, 2004) and structural social work theory (Mullaly, 1997; Mullaly, 2002). One of the key tenets of feminist standpoint theory is that to understand the dynamics of oppression it is necessary to ask those who are oppressed. Structural social work theory focuses on oppression as a major explanation for social problems and 'an anti oppressive social work practice as the means for dealing with these problems' (Mullaly, 2002, p. x). The research design therefore involved speaking to women about their experience of oppression. A non-probability purposive sampling and snowballing method was used to contact 30 women and semi-structured, in-depth interviews provided the opportunity to explore their experiences. Their stories were then thematically analysed.

Key Concepts

Post-separation shared parenting arrangements

In this study, ‘post-separation shared parenting arrangements’ refers to situations where both parents have some input into the care of the children after they have separated regardless of the percentage of time spent with the children or the responsibilities taken for their care. These arrangements may be court ordered or organised privately. They may be supervised or unsupervised and may change over time.

Physical violence

In this study, physical violence is defined as acts such as grabbing, scratching, squashing, squeezing, pushing, shoving, punching, slapping, throwing, suffocating, strangling, burning, hanging and stabbing. These types of behaviour are directed towards women by their partners as a means of having power over them, controlling or hurting them, or causing them injury. It is difficult, however, to ascertain where physically abusive behaviour becomes defined as physically violent. Touching or holding a person by the arm in a hostile and threatening manner can feel physically violent, but, legally, violence tends to be judged according to intent, verification and level of injury.

Physical abuse

The term ‘physical abuse’ in this study refers to the neglect or control of women’s needs for physical well-being, including sleep, nutrition, and physical autonomy and safety. This may not entail physically violent acts as detailed in the definition of physical violence.

Domestic violence

In this study, the definition of domestic violence reflects the shift in the literature away from a focus on individual acts of physical violence. Jaffe, Lemon and Poisson (2003, p. 4) point out that ‘domestic violence goes beyond individual acts of

aggression to encompass an overall pattern of behaviour aimed at maintaining complete control, by the use of fear and intimidation'. Stark calls this a 'pattern of liberty harms' (Stark, 2007, p. 8). The definition by Almeida and Durkin (1999, p. 313) adds the 'contextualising features of intentionality and coercive control':

Domestic violence is the patterned and repeated use of coercive and controlling behaviour to limit, direct, and shape a partner's thoughts, feelings and actions. An array of power and control tactics is used along a continuum in concert with one another.

The Partnerships Against Domestic Violence produced a Statement of Principles which was agreed upon by the Australian Heads of Government at the 1997 National Domestic Violence Summit. In this document, domestic violence was defined more broadly to include a number of types of abuse. Both psychological domination and emotional abuse were formally acknowledged as well as emotional, social and economic abuse:

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate or control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation (Access Economics, 2004).

Boundaries

The term 'boundaries' has been used in this study to indicate an important aspect of healthy relationships. The term refers to ownership over one's self and to have (for example) one's physical, sexual, social, economic and communication rights and needs respected and negotiated. Drawing links between the needs of humans and the needs of countries helps illuminate the need for good boundaries in all relationships. The way countries behave towards each other in the sharing of vital resources and the respecting of customs will affect each country's survival and independence. Boundaries can be transgressed by the behaviour of one country or person which neglects or controls another country's or person's needs and rights.

Introducing the Participants

The 30 women who participated in this study were drawn from each region of Tasmania, Australia's only island state. I introduce them as Amy, Karly, Lola Lucia, Cassandra, Caroline, Jane, Gabrielle, Genevieve, Virginia, Hayley, Collette, Wendy, Sue, Carol, Jodie, Leanne, Elle, Sally, Anita, Penny, Sam, Sharni, Veronica, Summer, Sebrina, Alice, Jasmine, Emanon, Barbara and Jessica. As a group, they provide significant information about their relationship with their ex-partner. This includes the aspects that had confused, disturbed and traumatised them. They are also deeply reflective and appraising of themselves as women, partners and mothers. Each woman spoke freely with me about their lives because they wanted to help other women and felt secure that I would preserve their anonymity. Given the size of this state, many of the women could quite easily be identified. I thus present the characteristics of this group of women in aggregate form, despite the way this detracts from an appreciation of the circumstances of each woman's life.

At the time of interview, the ages of the women in this study ranged from 28 to 60 years. One woman was 28, five women were in their 30s, 15 women were in their 40s, seven women were in their 50s and two women were in their 60s.

The lengths of the women's relationships varied greatly, with the shortest being under a year (one) and the longest 23 years (one). Nine women had lived with their partners between two and under 10 years, four for 10 years, two for 13 years, six for 15 years and seven for between 20 and 22 years.

The majority of the women (23) had been separated between two and 10 years. Eleven women had been separated between two and five years, 12 women had been separated between six and ten years, five women had been separated between 11 and 20 years and two women had been separated between 30 and 35 years.

The women were from both high and low socio-economic groups. They had held a wide variety of occupations at different stages of their lives. These included:

homemaker, a landscaper, an artist, a psychologist, two counsellors, six teachers, two disability workers, two nurses, an enrolled nurse, a nursing manager, two social workers, two shop assistants, a business owner, a chef, a site manager, one CEO, one university lecturer, a translator, a receptionist, and a payroll officer.

Of the total sample, three women identified as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. There were no women who identified as indigenous or disabled.

One of the main factors that differentiated the women in this study was whether they had experienced physical violence from their ex-partners within the relationship or not. Of the 30 women in this sample, 14 described physical violence as occurring on a regular or an occasional basis. Five of these women also reported being raped. The other 16 women who were interviewed reported a wide-ranging pattern of abuse that did not include pre-separation physical violence but, for three, included rape.

All of the women had children with their ex-partner. At the time of interview, there were 59 children, ranging in age from 18 months to 48 years. Six women had one child, 19 had two children, three had three children and two women had six children.

Of the 30 women, 17 had children in contact with their father at the time of interview but for 13 of the women the contact had either ceased or their children had turned 18 years. The women described a range of shared parenting arrangements with the majority being private and unsupervised or court ordered and unsupervised. There were no allegations of sexual abuse towards the children by the father but six women reported physical violence by the father towards the children.

This research focuses on the voices of these 30 women because the majority of their experiences of abuse were excluded from socio-legal support under the current system of Australian family law. Physical violence within their relationship was either: not experienced; not reported as being experienced; lacked the frequency or severity needed to achieve legal validation; unable to be legally proven or

authenticated; or legally authenticated but post-separation contact was still required with their ex-partner.

Summary of the study's findings

This study reflects on the manner in which the conceptualisation of domestic violence has affected the socio-legal response for women in post-separation shared parenting arrangements. An overarching finding was that the deleterious impact of living with domestic violence on the whole spectrum of the women's lives was unable to be unrecognised by the family law system because of the social and legal tendency to address only the most obvious and provable aspects of violence.

A crucial finding of this study is the commonality of dynamics evident in all the stories of the women's pre-separation relationships, irrespective of their experience of physical violence. Central to the women's experience of their partners was a core of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes. These attitudes created a constellation of double standards and double binds which denied the women equality, autonomy and agency despite their resistance. Such attitudes also created a core behavioural style that was characterised by a concerted and relentless pattern of boundary violations. The attitudinal and behavioural style affected the entire relationship and was described as a web of abuse. The significance of the web of abuse was visible in the way it impacted on the women and continued post-separation. The web of abuse created shared experiences of post-separation oppression in the women's lives irrespective of the frequency or duration of their ex-partner's parenting time with the children.

Structure of the Study

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two locates the issue of post-separation parenting in the aftermath of domestic violence within the relevant literature on domestic violence. The evolution in the conceptualisation of the definition, dynamics and effects of domestic violence is examined. It is argued that this research provides the necessary context for the post-separation shared parenting literature.

Chapter Three describes and justifies the choice of research methodology and research design. Specifically, it considers: the merit of feminist standpoint theory in exploring domestic violence; the ethical considerations of the provision of emotional and physical safety for both the researched and the researcher when interviewing in the field of domestic violence; the recruitment of the participants, the interview process; and the data analysis.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the research findings. The thematic findings presented in Chapter Four illustrate the women's experiences and perceptions of their pre-separation relationship with their ex-partners. It identifies the attitudinal and behavioural style that denied the women equality, autonomy and agency within the relationship. It also identifies how this style created a web of abuse within which the women felt trapped and unable to extricate themselves. The dynamics of the web of abuse provided an important foundation from which to understand the women's post-separation experiences of shared parenting, irrespective of whether the web of abuse had included the experience of physical violence.

Chapter Five presents the results of the data collected in relation to the impact on the women of living within the web of abuse. There was a commonality of cognitive, affective and behavioural effects described by the women irrespective of whether they had experienced physical violence. The impact of the web of abuse undermined the restoration of their lives post-separation.

Chapter Six presents the results of the data collected in relation to the women's post-separation experiences. The commonality of dynamics discussed in Chapter Four and their impact on the women discussed in Chapter Five gave rise to shared experiences of oppression that were not limited to the specific features of their shared parenting arrangements. This was the result of a relentless post-separation pattern of the same types of boundary violations, double standards, double binds and a lack of empathy from which the women had also found it very difficult to extricate themselves from pre-separation.

Chapters Seven and Eight provide the analytical discussion of the data. Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the results of the three data chapters. An innovative model is presented which suggests the centrality of psychological and emotional abuse to all the other forms of abuse included in definitions of domestic violence. However, rather than reducing domestic violence to different forms of abuse, parallels are drawn between the experience of domestic violence and the process of colonisation. The other ‘forms’ of abuse are simply the areas of the relationship where the colonising attitudes and behaviours manifest. For example, colonising attitudes and behaviours towards the women within their physical and sexual relationship with their partner, their social and economic arrangements, communication patterns and in the way that the women were publically portrayed resulted in physical, sexual, social, economic, communication and defamation abuse.

Chapter Eight concludes the study with an exploration of the implications of conceptualising domestic violence independently of physical violence and as a process of colonisation. If physical violence is not a reliable or equitable indicator of domestic violence, the current incident and injury-based socio-legal response fails to address the oppression of women’s liberty pre- and post-separation. The conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest that critical to the anti-oppressive practice of social workers and other professionals in the field of domestic violence is their ability to detect and disrupt colonising attitudes and behaviours. Colluding with such attitudes and behaviours undermines the value of the social work profession to women and children at further risk of abuse. Yet understanding the dynamics underlying domestic violence allows the formulation of socio-legal policies and practices that can facilitate non-oppressive shared parenting arrangements

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

This chapter has established the foundations for this study by providing the background to the research, introducing the research aims, questions and the significance of the problem, summarising the study’s methodology and the main findings, and outlining an overview of the remaining chapters.

In the next chapter I provide a literature review that locates the study within the relevant contemporary research and literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Domestic violence is a term that was initially synonymous with physical violence, or ‚battering’ (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). It is now regarded as a multi-faceted phenomenon (Heise, 1998) involving many forms of abuse (PADV, 1999). Since the 1970s, domestic violence has become a controversial topic which has been widely researched in Western industrialised countries. Despite this, there is still no universal definition as to what constitutes domestic violence, family violence or any of the related terms. Domestic violence can be defined ‚with reference to various contextual elements such as relationships, location of offences, and/or domestic arrangements’ (ABS, 2009). It remains a challenge to identify when a woman’s experience of abuse can be identified as domestic violence without it hinging on the experience of physical violence. Primarily, this literature review explores the research from Australia, the United States, Britain and Canada on domestic violence towards women by their male spouses. These countries have similar approaches to and concerns with family law and post-separation shared parenting issues. The existence and relevance of the literature and evidence for violence and abuse towards men or children by women is acknowledged in this study but not explored in this review, as the focus is on the experience of women. There are three sections in this literature review, representing three distinctive aspects of these concerns.

The first section, ‚Conceptualising domestic violence’, traces the ideas that have contributed to the current conceptualisation and definition of domestic violence in these countries. It includes a cross-section of studies that explore the links between the physical and non-physical aspects of women’s experiences of domestic violence. The recent approaches to conceptualising the dynamics of domestic violence other than physical violence are presented.

The second section, ‚The effects of domestic violence’, presents the research that illustrates how the conceptualisation of domestic violence has influenced the research on the impact of domestic violence on women. In this section, the context and relevance of societal trends are noted for their ramifications to understanding

women's lived experiences of domestic violence. The exploration of the research in these first two sections provides the context for understanding women's experiences of post-separation shared parenting in a context of domestic violence.

The third section, 'Post-separation shared parenting', discusses the literature on post-separation shared parenting for women, in the context of domestic violence. The current pro-contact emphasis in many Western government policies has attracted much criticism in the domestic violence literature for poorly addressing the risks to the post-separation safety of women and children (Wilson & Daly, 1993; Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson, 2003; Mahoney, 1991). This section notes these criticisms and details the research exploring women's experiences of the lack of socio-legal protection in post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Excluded from such research are the voices of women where 'physical violence could either not be legally authenticated or had not been experienced' (Harrison, 2008, p. 400). It is argued that a focus on physical violence conceals the significant impact of the non-physical aspects of domestic violence.

Conceptualising Domestic Violence

Physical violence

In Western countries in the 1970s, the representation of physical violence against women in crime statistics drew public attention towards the significance of domestic violence (Patton, 2005). Sorsoli (2004, p. 9) notes that, as with the study of trauma, research on domestic violence first focused on the physical, before addressing the sexual: 'Trauma was originally defined in terms of physical forces and understood from an intra-psychic rather than relational perspective'. Psychological, sociological and feminist research in the area of domestic violence was initially dominated by attempts to explicate and quantify its physical components. Domestic violence, in effect, became equated with physical violence. In Australia, for example, Alexander (1993) traced the leading definitions of domestic violence and noted with concern their emphasis on how many episodes of physical violence constituted wife battering,

whether the violence was intentional, and verifiable, and the level of injury it caused to the woman. Alexander's concerns were typical of a gradual but significant shift that occurred in the literature after the 1990s when the emphasis on the role physical abuse played in domestic violence was challenged as being at the expense of understanding the role of non-physical abuse in domestic violence. This appeared to mirror a shift from quantitative to qualitative research in the quest to understand women's experience of domestic violence.

Non-physical abuse refers to several types of abuse including emotional abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, verbal abuse and social abuse. Of these, psychological and emotional abuse have been particularly difficult to define. The following sub-section details research that is characteristic of the efforts to identify the non-physical components of domestic violence. This research has contributed to the Western understanding of the links between the physical and non-physical aspects of domestic violence. Whereas domestic violence still tends to be defined and minimised in the community as discrete acts of physical abuse by a male perpetrator towards his female partner (Seddon, 1993), it is now widely accepted that these perceptions underestimate the extent of attitudes and behaviours that actually constitute domestic violence. However, understanding the relationship between each form of abuse and physical abuse remains elusive in the research.

Defining psychological and emotional abuse

From the early 1980s there was a focus in the Australian and international literature on the gravity of emotional and psychological abuse. As noted by Alexander (1993), early Australian statistics from studies on „wife battering' using telephone surveys indicated that 47–88 per cent of the callers spoke of verbal or mental abuse. However, defining these forms of abuse has proved difficult and therefore assessing the role that they play in physically abusive relationships has been confusing.

Initially, an assortment of terminology was used to describe emotional and psychological abuse, such as non-physical abuse, emotional or psychological maltreatment, verbal abuse, psychological violence, verbal and symbolic violence

(McKinnon, 2008). Inevitably two terms were used consistently: some researchers used the term ‚psychological abuse’ to describe abuse that is not physical in nature (Chang, 1995, 1996; Marshall, 1994, 1996, 1999) while others used the term ‚emotional abuse’ (Douglas, 1994; Kirkwood, 1993; Loring, 1994). The lack of consensus about language and definition makes it difficult to compare and contrast the research findings. Alexander (1993), along with other researchers, grappled with the definition of emotional abuse and was concerned that non-physical violence was only explored in relationship to physical violence. Psychological abuse was also seen as a ‚correlated yet distinct phenomenon’ that was described, for example, by Chang as a ‚unique form of interpersonal aggression’ (Chang, 1996, p.7). Despite the lack of agreement about the terminology, the same or similar behaviours are listed for both emotional and psychological abuse within the literature.

There are also varying ideas on the relationship of emotional abuse and psychological abuse to physical violence. Some studies explain emotional or psychological abuse as preceding physical violence (Hyden, 1995; Murphy & O’Leary, 1989). As early as 1974, Straus reported a strong association between psychological abuse and the probability of physical assault. Murphy and O’Leary (1989) suggest that the early presence of psychological abuse tended to result in physical abuse within the first thirty months of marriage. Other researchers discuss and conceptualise emotional or psychological abuse as co-existing with, or part of, both physical and sexual abuse (Anderson, Boulette & Schwartz, 1991; Kirkwood, 1993; Martin, 1976; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Walker, 1984); as escalating into physical violence (Evans, 1992); as accompanying physical violence (Brown & Alexander, 2007); as core to all abuse and neglect including physical violence (Hart, Germain & Brassard, 1987; McGee & Wolfe, 1991) and as a form of domestic violence (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Studies by Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause and Polek (1990) and Anderson, et al. (1991) were significant in this era. Follingstad et al. (1990) interviewed 234 women by telephone using a self-report questionnaire devised to collect ‚objective and specific facts rather than subject’s opinions’ (Follingstad et al., 1990, p. 111). Women with some history of physical abuse were interviewed in order to ascertain the

relationship of emotional abuse to physical abuse in their relationships. They were surprised to find that 99 per cent of the women had experienced emotional abuse and they identified six main types. These are ridicule, jealousy, threats to change marriage, threats of abuse, damage to property and restrictions of the women. They found that the latter three appeared to be predictive of physical abuse but that ridicule was reported by a highest percentage of callers as having the most negative impact.

Follingstad et al. (1990, p. 118) concluded that: „it is difficult to state with any certainty what the high frequency of emotional abuse in physically abusive relationships means’. They argue that it is necessary to compare battering relationships with non-battering relationships in order to assess whether emotional abuse occurred at differing rates. This was typical of the incident/injury approach to researching domestic violence where abuse was considered to be episodic.

The idea that psychological maltreatment was present in some form in most incidents of physical violence and was likely to be a common denominator in violent relationships was proposed in 1991 by Anderson et al. They refer to the association between wife battering and mind control that had already been suggested by a number of investigators such as Dutton and Painter (1981, 1983), Hilberman (1980) and Walker (1977, 1980).

Although Anderson et al. (1991) state that the presence of psychological coercion in any relationship is maladaptive, their focus was on all married or unmarried couples: „in which the woman had shown evidence of physical abuse on at least one occasion at the hands of an intimate male partner’ (Anderson et al., 1991, p. 293). They view the patterns of psychological maltreatment as risk factors for violent behaviour, rather than as risk factors for women themselves. This was despite the connections they made between psychological maltreatment and mind control or brain washing. They also suggest that psychological maltreatment: „is characterised by many of the features of psychological coercion and deception found in religious or political cults and that distinguish them from other tightly knit social systems in society’ (Anderson et al., 1991, p. 294).

Ward (2000), an Australian child and family counsellor who works with ex-cult members, explains that the knowledge of cult dynamics is key to their assessment and intervention. He uses Tobias and Lalich's (1994) definition of a cult:

A group or movement exhibiting great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing, and employing unethical manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control, designed to advance the goal of the group's leaders to the actual or possible detriment of their members, their families or community (Tobias & Lalich, 1994, p. 12).

Ward notes the parallels with of these dynamics to domestic violence and suggests that the power and control wheel (the Duluth model) used to describe domestic violence is „equally useful in describing the cultic environment' (Ward, 2000, p. 41). However, he makes an important distinction between cults that employ coercive techniques and those groups that may be strict or religious but „are not systematically deceptive or manipulative and the inquirer is informed beforehand what to expect and can generally leave upon request' (Ward, 2000, p. 38). This was also acknowledged by Tolman in 1992.

Similarly, the experience of being coercively controlled was captured by cognitive psychologists in the late 1970s and 1980s by drawing links to „coercive persuasion, brainwashing and other tactics used with hostages, prisoners of war, kidnap victims and by pimps with prostitutes' (Stark, 2007, p. 12). The techniques used to shatter and remould prisoner of war (POW) personalities were outlined by Farber, Harlow and West in 1957. They classify these techniques as the three Ds of conversion under coercion: debilitation, dread and dependency. In 1985, Romero drew comparisons between the coercive and manipulative strategies used by batterers on women and those used by captors on prisoners of war: „within a context of intimidation and threat of physical violence, the strategies used by captors and batterers included psychological abuse, emotional dependency and isolation from a support system' (Romero, 1985, p. 541). Romero points out that the intimacy shared with their partners created greater vulnerability for the women and that the incidence of sexual abuse in domestic violence is probably higher than in POWs. This would lead to a greater degree of humiliation and degradation and loss of self-esteem in the women.

Important parallels were noted by Bancroft (2002) and Pence and Paymar (1993) between the behaviours and justifications used by men who abuse women and any oppressive organisation or system. For example, Bancroft (2002, p. 336) describes the similarity of the tactics of control used by batterers and the intimidation of workers who try to protest; the undermining of efforts at independence, using negative distortions about the workers in order to cast blame upon them and the careful cultivation of the public image of the oppressors.

Similarly, a woman experiencing domestic violence who stands up to her partner can face repercussions not only from him but socio-legally as well. For example, under the changes made to family law by the Howard government in 2006, a woman making allegations of violence faces the threat of penalties if they are unable to provide sufficient evidence to support their allegation. This type of threat and the intimidation of victims who try to protest is similar to that faced by internal or external whistleblowers as punishment for speaking up. For example, American (Glazer & Glazer, 1989; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999) and Australian studies of whistleblowers (De Maria & Jan, 1997) found the majority of whistleblowers lost their job or were subject to various forms of harassment. These included putting the spotlight on the whistleblower not the actual wrongdoing, creating records and campaigns that damaged the whistleblower's reputation, humiliating and isolating the whistleblower, and denying work that was meaningful or that would lead to future career opportunities.

Although the focus of this research is on domestic violence as experienced by women, this is not meant to be at the expense of linking the commonality of dynamics underlying oppressive, abusive behaviour on a larger scale, which can also be perpetrated by women. A commonality between the dynamics of hostage or oppressive relationships is clear. For example, the research describing the treatment of whistleblowers, prisoners of war and cult members depicts dominating dynamics similar to those used by a more powerful country, organisation or group. The commonality of experience of trying to leave, counter or extricate oneself from such domination is also clear. The threat to the dominator results in a range of tactics of

control and deflection of all responsibility in order to maintain a positive public image. These dynamics result in an inability for the relationship to be negotiated or to evolve in the interests of both parties. These studies clearly show the chronicity of the experience of domestic violence by drawing attention to the strategies used to maintain control at the expense of and against the will of the hostage. Although no links have been made to the post-separation consequences for women, the implications are clear.

Although the initial emphasis on quantitative research and the use of surveys or questionnaires was considered necessary in order to ‚adjust the bar of injury required for real abuse so that intervention [could] match available resources’ (Stark, 2007, p. 86), this also prevented women from being able to openly explore their experiences and perceptions. For example, the efforts of Follingstad et al. (1990) to avoid the ambiguity involved in seeking opinions restricted the participants to elicited responses. It can be argued that overall the absence of women’s voices affected early attempts to define emotional and psychological abuse and clarify their relationship to physical abuse.

The mid-1990s heralded an era of research that focused on psychological or emotional abuse in their own right, without reference to physical violence, using a qualitative approach and an open interviewing style. The majority of these studies were conducted by Western, white, female researchers, although not necessarily purporting to be feminist.

The relationship between physical and non-physical abuse

The idea that emotional abuse may exist independently of physical abuse within relationships was promoted by researchers such as Chang (1995, 1996), Loring (1994) and Marshall (1996, 1999). These researchers posit that while physical abuse is almost always accompanied by emotional abuse, the presence of emotional abuse does not always indicate or predict the presence of concurrent physical or sexual abuse.

In 1991, Loring and Myers conducted lengthy open interviews with 121 women and clearly established the presence of women who were emotionally but not physically abused. In 1994 Loring concluded that emotionally abusive behaviour on its own has a powerful impact that does not require legitimisation by the additional experience of physical battering. Loring notes that emotional abuse can be both covert and overt and can occur independently of physical battering as a pattern of demeaning and humiliating treatment of women. Loring (1997, p. 12) also describes continuous emotional abuse, interspersed with some warmth and kindness, as an integral part of the pattern of abuse:

...the mechanisms of abuse are ongoing and usually comprise a combination of overt and covert patterns of violence. The violent aspect of the continuous emotional assaults is difficult to detect, given the victim's inability to self identify and the batterer's denial (Loring, 1997, p.12).

Psychological abuse as independent of physical abuse was addressed by Chang in 1996. Chang, a feminist scholar, studied the biographies of 16 women who had experienced a psychologically abusive relationship. A definition for psychological abuse was adapted from work on the psychological maltreatment of children and from studies of psychological abuse within psychologically abusive relationships (Chang, 1996, p. 6). A psychologically abusive relationship was defined as:

a relationship involving verbal battering including repeated ridicule, verbal attacks, threats, accusation, verbal hostility, unrealistic expectations, domination, and/or name calling; economic deprivation involving withholding, regulating and controlling money in coercive ways; social humiliation such as threatening or acting in embarrassing, aggressive, or obnoxious ways in order to force accommodation to demands; social isolation including determining allowable associates and establishing inappropriate restrictions; and sexual domination in terms of excessive demands for a sexual relationship and sexual put downs (Chang, 1996, pp. 6-7).

This is an extensive definition of psychological abuse that includes covert and overt tactics of verbal, social, sexual and economic abuse. It indicates the extent to which this form of abuse can permeate women's lives. Chang used an interpretative interactionist method of study in order to understand the feelings, thoughts and process of change in the women participating in her study. In doing so, Chang

avoided the silencing of women by the dominant discourse of domestic violence as physical violence.

Chang compares the descriptions of psychological abuse in physically abusive relationships with descriptions from psychologically abusive relationships without physical abuse to illustrate the similarities between the two types of relationships. She identifies domination and control by the husband as a core theme in both types of relationships, a finding that is supported by many studies of domestic violence that focus on physical violence. For example, Chang (1996, p. 50) notes that all the women in Walker's (1979) study of physically abusive relationships depict domination as central to their experience of abuse.

Chang surmises that the origin of psychological abuse in males is a sense of entitlement to be in a position of dominance, control and power over their partner. She describes the patterns of psychological abuse as being characterised by perfectionist demands, economic domination, sexual domination, social isolation, humiliation and little understanding or support for the wife. She found that men who were psychologically abusive have a „charming but phony' way of being appealing and likeable to others in order to gain recognition or support for their view of themselves, despite humiliating their wives in public. The relationships are described by Chang as characterised by high negative or abusive behaviour and low positive or kind behaviour: „The polarities of domination and submission and aggression and passivity pervade all aspects of the relationship' (Chang, 1996, p. 57).

Issues of power and control in violent and abusive relationships are also explored by Jenkins (1990), writing as an Australian practitioner rather than a researcher. Jenkins suggests that „Western industrialised society is characterised by competition and a hierarchical structure' (Jenkins, 1990, p. 33) in which the notions of ownership and the right to exercise power over subordinates is considered the blueprint for individual success. He maintains that many men have a sense of entitlement at the expense of their social and emotional responsibility. His colleague, White (1984), a

noted Australian narrative therapist, also observes this imbalance of perceived status and entitlement as being characteristic of ‚dominant–submissive’ relationships.

A more comprehensive and in-depth perspective of domestic violence emerged when women were given a voice in qualitative, open and unstructured interviews. This allowed the nature of the ‚contextualising features of intentionality and coercive control’ (Almeida & Durkin, 1999, p. 313) to be explored in the context of women’s lives and facilitated greater understanding of women’s lived experience. On the other hand, the less tangible aspects of domestic violence lack a standardisation of terminology and definition, making it difficult to compare cross-cultural data. For example, Tang (1998) in her study of the psychological abuse of Chinese wives, decided that despite various other terminology used in Western literature, in her study all non-physical forms of wife abuse would be termed psychological abuse.

In response to the study of non-physical abuse, a much broader definition of domestic violence was agreed upon by the Australian Heads of Government at the 1997 National Domestic Violence Summit. The Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Statement of Principles formally acknowledged both psychological domination and emotional abuse within their definition of domestic violence:

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate or control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation (PADV, 1998–1999)

A number of approaches to conceptualising the less easily quantifiable non-physical aspects inherent to domestic violence emerged as researchers and practitioners attempted to understand women’s experiences of abuse. These conceptualisations underpin current understandings of the links between physical and non-physical abuse. The majority of this work has been achieved by feminist researchers, although strongly corroborated by a number of male researchers.

The main approaches are presented in the following sub-sections. They have been structured according to the different facets and complexity of women's lived experiences rather than the chronological order in which they appeared in the literature.

Inventories

There has been a consistent focus on the identification and categorisation of behaviours that may constitute non-physical violence. For example Sonkin, Martin and Walker (1985) describe psychological abuse as including: explicit and implicit threats of violence; extreme controlling behaviour; pathological jealousy; mental degradation; and isolating behaviour. Sackett and Saunders (2001) also focus on inventories of behaviour identifying four types of psychological abuse: ridiculing of traits, criticising behaviour, ignoring, and jealous control.

Such inventories coincided with the use of different types of measurements and scales to firstly identify and then quantify the existence of various types of non-physical abuse. Kelly (2004) describes how they were heavily debated and contrasted in the research in the search for a reliable, consistent construct. In terms of women's lived experience, though, the use of a continuum provides greater detail.

Continuums

The usefulness of a continuum to describe the experience of psychological abuse was introduced by Tolman (1992). Tolman developed his continuum by first establishing the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory. This was one of the most comprehensive inventories, comprising 58 items. Although criticised for a number of reasons (for example, Marshall, 1994, states that Tolman's Inventory identified behaviours as abusive only if they are successful in controlling the victim), Tolman argues that instead of viewing psychological abuse as consisting of particular behaviours, it is more useful to describe psychological abuse as a continuum. On one end of the continuum are incidences of hurtful behaviours common in any relationship, such as withdrawing momentarily, listening unempathetically or

speaking sharply in anger. On the other end is a concerted pattern of psychological torture parallel to the intentional brainwashing of prisoners of war (Tolman, 1992). Although this continuum of behaviour explains the covert to overt nature of abuse, it does not address how psychological abuse interrelates with other forms of abuse experienced within domestic violence.

A cycle

A more three-dimensional understanding of women's experiences of domestic violence was provided by the concept of a cycle of violence. A particularly groundbreaking and seminal study was conducted by Walker (1984). Underpinned by a feminist perspective, she used open-ended interviewing techniques to explicate the details of over 400 women's lives. She understood domestic violence as an abuse of power and control by the batterer and argues that women in violent relationships live with a cycle of violence by the women's partners. This cycle involves the build-up of tension in the batterer, an explosion of violence, and a honeymoon period of contrition, apologies and promises (Walker, 1984). Walker also refers to Patterson's (1982) study of coercive behaviour in aggressive children's family interactions which found that the sequencing of stimuli rather than the number of negative behavioural acts distinguish the abusive family pattern from a dysfunctional one (Walker, 2000, p. 39):

The psychologically abusive acts occurred in a pattern with negative behaviours being chained one after another followed by positive acts in the same chaining sequence. This created what Patterson labelled 'chaining and fogging behaviour that was extremely difficult to respond to' (Walker, 2000, p. 34).

Walker's study supports this view, and she argues that the sequence and timing of the acts impact on the women as well as the nature of the acts. She surmises that the 'chaining and fogging' pattern is the essence of the abusive behaviour pattern described by her participants (Walker, 2000, p. 39).

Walker also links psychological abuse with the definition of psychological torture used by Amnesty International. It is clear from the women's reports that

psychological abuse is experienced as the most painful. Walker surmises that physical abuse rarely occurs without psychological abuse. However, she describes how physically abusive incidents are ‚so compelling and overwhelming’ that the psychological components receive less attention (Walker, 2000, p. 34).

Even though the details for psychological abuse were never quantifiably measured very reliably for her study she was able to directly measure social and financial isolation and verbal harassment (Walker, 1984, p. 27). She found that the battering relationship negatively impacted on the social and economic independence of the women in her study.

Whereas Walker understood domestic violence as an abuse of power and control, her theory has been criticised as ‚obscuring the social and political dimensions of women abuse’ (Smith, 1996, p. 4) because it explains the women’s conduct rather than focussing on the manner in which they were trapped within their relationships. The Battered Women Syndrome appears to explain why women don’t leave by relying on the assumption that leaving was a viable and safe option and would simply end the violence and abuse for the woman and the children. Her work also neglects women who experienced minor if any physical assault and thus explains the dynamics only in the context of physical abuse.

Nonetheless, her cycle of violence theory challenges the simplicity of the notion of a continuum of abuse and traces women’s experiences to other aspects of their relationship, such as social and financial. Walker also draws links between domestic violence and women’s fear of post-separation legal proceedings.

Patterns of interactions

Patterns of interactions between a couple that are psychologically abusive and do not necessarily include physical violence are detailed by Chang (1995). Chang’s (1995) study of patterns of interaction makes an important contribution to the research on the dynamics of domestic violence, particularly the relevance and centrality of psychological abuse. Identifying these patterns extends Walker’s cycle of violence

theory and avoids its focus on physical abuse. Chang discusses five interaction patterns which have as their commonality the woman adapting to the man without reciprocity. The first pattern, for example, is complimentary schismogenesis or ‚adjust yourself‘, a concept first introduced by Bateson in 1972. This involves one partner constantly adjusting in response to the other partner to the extent that it leads to a ‚progressive unilateral distortion of the personalities ... which results in mutual hostility between them and must end in the breakdown of the system‘ (Bateson, 1972, p. 42). The other patterns are double binds, direct verbal attack, silence and withdrawal, and lack of emotional connection.

Chang (1995) does not conceptualise how the five interaction patterns may overlap or interrelate with one another because of their commonality, but rather states that three or more of these patterns exist in all psychologically abusive relationships.

A wheel

The power and control wheel is a widely-used graphic representation of abuse. It was introduced by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1984. The wheel is based on group interviews with more than 200 women who attended educational classes presented by the Duluth Battered Women’s Shelter (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

This study further advances a useful conceptualisation of domestic violence in that it uses the concept of a wheel to portray the tactics of control used to create a total sphere of influence on women’s lives. Although physical and sexual violence is depicted as the rim of the wheel, the hub is power and control and its spokes depict the ways in which control is achieved. The spokes refer to emotional and economic abuse, coercion and threats, intimidation, isolation, minimising, denying, blaming, using children, and using male privilege. Psychological abuse is not included but the tactics in the wheel described as emotional abuse bear close resemblance to Chang’s definition of psychological abuse. This is further testimony to the lack of standardisation of the non-physical components of domestic violence, particularly emotional and psychological abuse.

The power and control wheel illustrates very clearly the role physical violence plays within a pattern of behaviors and refutes any notion of isolated or discrete incidents of abuse. This pattern may include infrequent or minor violence that is used to reinforce the ability of the other tactics on the wheel (for example, emotional abuse, isolation, threats of taking the children) to prevent the women's autonomy.

Many of the women in this study criticised theories such as Walker's that describe battering as cyclical explosions of pent-up anger, frustration, or painful feelings, arguing instead that it is a constant force in their relationship. As well, the women criticised attempts in the domestic violence literature to attribute physical violence to stress, as that diverts attention from their experience of physical violence as being used to gain control (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

The main general criticism of this model is that it does not reflect women's capacity for physical violence, despite Pence and Paymar's (1993) attempts to draw comparisons between the tactics used by batterers and those used by many groups or individuals in positions of power including women:

Each of the tactics depicted on the Power and Control Wheel are typical of behaviors used by groups of people who dominate others. They are the tactics employed to sustain racism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, and many other forms of group domination (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 2).

The absence of any reference to women's capacity to misuse power in society has meant that the usefulness of this wheel in elaborating on the power and control aspects of domestic violence has been questioned by those critics in search of a more gender neutral approach to domestic violence.

A number of more valid limitations of the model can be made. The assumption that the core of power and control results in physical and/or sexual violence marginalises many women. It fails to acknowledge those women who have not experienced what is socially considered to be physical or sexual violence in their relationships but who are still experiencing identical tactics of power and control. Neither is the model clear on what actually constitutes power and control, or where physical and sexual inequality

as a result of power and control becomes physical and sexual abuse and/or violence. Finally, because the tactics are visually represented as discrete sections all connected to an elusive concept of power and control, it does not convey how these tactics may be interrelated in the women's lives. Despite these limitations, it can be argued that the Duluth model significantly contributes to our current understanding of domestic violence. Even though the model was conceptualised early in the research on domestic violence it offers a more in-depth perspective than even later conceptualisations of the dynamics of domestic violence. It clearly depicts the tactics used to keep the power and control as permeating every aspect of the women's lives, such as their economic and social arrangements with their partners and their communication patterns. It also considers the impact of these tactics post-separation and provides explanations for the experiences of women who share parenting with their ex-partners.

A web

The concept of a web comprised of interconnecting and overlapping components makes a further significant contribution to understanding the lived experience of women in domestic violence. In 1993, Kirkwood used the concept of a web to explain how emotional abuse operated in the lives of the 30 women she interviewed. She used unstructured interviews to explore the experiences, feelings, beliefs and actions of women who had left an abusive relationship. Kirkwood made no stipulations that they should have experienced physical abuse, just 'abuse'. This was in response to information from services working with batterers that women were being severely terrorised without the use of physical violence. As well, Kirkwood wanted to avoid silencing women by asking them to match their experiences to a particular definition.

Kirkwood (1993) describes a web of emotional abuse that has six overlapping and interconnected components: degradation, fear, objectification, deprivation, overburden of responsibility, and distortion of subjective reality. „The terminology of “web”, then, conveys the fabric of emotional abuse with respect to its delicate interconnections, which afford an overall strength and a capacity to entrap’ (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 60).

Kirkwood also successfully conveys the entrapment that women experienced which is not related to physical violence. She posits that emotional abuse 'laid the foundations for physical violence' (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 61) but does not necessarily result in physical violence. Kirkwood's concept of a web with interlinking and overlapping components expands on the visually discrete sections offered by the Duluth model. It also allows for an understanding of abuse as a chronic rather than an episodic or cyclical occurrence.

However, although emotional abuse is clearly conveyed as entrapping, there is no description of what is at the centre of the web or of a way to conceptually link the affects of power and control on other areas of their pre or post-separation relationship. If emotional abuse can be conceptualised as a web, it would seem logical to assume other aspects of domestic violence, or other forms of abuse, can be similarly conceptualised.

Kirkwood also implies the consequences of a web of emotional abuse for post-separation recovery. Whereas she does not focus on the experiences of women in shared parenting arrangements post-separation, she connects the implications of a web of emotional abuse to post-separation issues. She explains that for the women to disentangle from the web and secure independence involves a 'struggle with elements of a culture which complicated their efforts to separate from abusive partners' (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 153). For the women Kirkwood interviewed, there was a 'process of an emotional, material and social struggle which lasted for years' (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 153).

A tree

The idea of a tree to convey the attitudes and values underlying the forms of abuse inherent to domestic violence was introduced in 2002. Lundy Bancroft conceptualises abuse as a tree, 'growing from attitudes and values, not feelings. The roots are ownership, the trunk is entitlement and the branches are control' (Bancroft, 2002, p. 75). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) clarify the mechanisms by which they think

psychological injury and emotional recovery take place in homes affected by domestic violence, particularly with regard to post-separation shared parenting issues.

Bancroft and Silverman work directly with men who use physical violence and are therefore well placed to describe behavioural characteristics of batterers. They argue that the imposition of a pattern of control over their partners, which is carried out through tactics such as criticism, verbal abuse, economic control, isolation and cruelty, is central to domestic violence. Like Chang and Jenkins, they believe that the overarching attitudinal characteristics of entitlement and the expectations of being physically, emotionally and sexually catered to may be the most critical concepts in understanding the battering mentality: „Batterers are thus distinguished partly by their high and unreasonable expectations, including forceful and urgent demands for catering’ (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, p.7). The fact that a sense of entitlement can lead to a batterer seeing themselves as superior and having double standards is also noted by Bancroft and Silverman (2002). They discuss how the men they worked with would create sympathy and support for themselves with the use of strategies such as: damaging their partner’s credibility; justifying themselves; externalizing responsibility for their behaviour; and portraying their partners as provocative and dishonest. These are similar to the tactics discussed by Pence and Paymar (1993).

Whereas the idea of a tree is less visually complex and does not capture the level of entrapment that a web does, it draws attention to the commonality of the attitudes and values of batterers as the possible core of all the conceptualisations of domestic violence. From this, one can deduce that there is a pattern of behaviours that infiltrates the relationships these men have with their partners. Bancroft and Silverman (2002) also propose that these patterns affect the women and children post-separation, and argue strongly that the quality of parenting that the batterer is capable of is affected by these core attitudes.

A cage

The visual concept of women being trapped in abusive relationships by the bars of a cage is suggested by Stark (2007), an advocate, counsellor and forensic social worker.

He expresses concern for what he sees as the limits to the domestic violence revolution brought about by a:

... failure to provide a usable picture of abuse, the failure to explain the durability of abusive relationships and failure to devise a credible strategy to win justice for battered women in the legal system. These enigmas are rooted in the equation of abuse with violent incidents. To resolve these enigmas requires an alternative model of how women are entrapped in personal life (Stark, 2007, p. 4).

Stark proposes that women are trapped by their partner's psychological subjugation, strategies of violence, intimidation, isolation, humiliation, exploitation, and micromanagement of everyday life.

Whereas Stark does not downplay women's capacity for abuse and violence, he takes a feminist perspective in that he believes that 'there is no counterpart in men's lives to women's entrapment by men in personal life due to coercive control' (Stark, 2007, p. 6). He draws parallels with the bars of a cage and suggests that the basic harm inflicted on women by abusive men is political. Women are deprived of rights and resources 'critical to personhood and citizenship' (Stark, 2007, p. 5). He argues that the tactics used can be invisible or treated as insignificant in comparison to physical violence.

Stark disputes the cyclical theory of violence, stating that it is only partially accurate that tensions build before exploding in violence and that this theory perpetrates the myth that assaults are 'neatly circumscribed'. He states that abusive assaults may be minor even if frequent and are typically comprised of numerous acts of coercion and control, to varying degrees of severity.

Stark provides a vast amount of information linking the experiences of the women in his practice to a common pattern of entrapping behaviours he observes in their partners, which could be even more useful if further summarised within a 'usable picture of abuse'.

An iceberg

The description of non-physical abuse as being similar to an iceberg was introduced in 2008 by McKinnon, an Australian family therapist. She explains that only the tip of this iceberg is visible, such as the use of verbal abuse, while the psychological and emotional abuse may remain submerged.

McKinnon (2008, p. 2) notes that currently in practice: ‚there is still little consensus between professionals about what constitutes abuse or domestic violence when there is no physical abuse involved’. She also expresses concern that there is still no consensus as to what constitutes psychological and emotional abuse and questions if non-physical abuse is a form of domestic violence in itself. McKinnon presents the argument that non-physical contact abuse can be considered a form of domestic violence when it involves an attempt by one person to dominate and control the other; there is a power differential and/or where one partner fears the other.

She therefore conceptualises non-physical abuse as verbal, emotional and psychological abuse and visually represents them as overlapping, stating that: ‚emotional abuse almost always incorporates verbal abuse and psychological abuse almost always incorporates emotional abuse’ (McKinnon, 2008, p. 12).

McKinnon’s encapsulation of non-physical abuse makes it clear that without adequate probing by practitioners, the signs of psychological abuse and the imbalance of power inherent in domestic violence may be overlooked. She elevates the importance of distinguishing non-physical abuse from relationship conflict and situates it as a possible indicator of domestic violence, particularly as ‚some of the effects of physical abuse may be due to effects of simultaneous psychological abuse’ (McKinnon, 2008, p. 14). Although she places non-physical abuse at the centre of domestic violence, McKinnon does not connect it to other aspects of the client’s lives, such as sexual or economic abuse.

These nine conceptualisations characterise the main endeavours within the research to understand the links between non-physical and physical abuse. Conceptually, they

increasingly focus on the continuous, overlapping and entrapping nature of women's experiences, irrespective of whether this included physical violence. However, the current socio-legal response to domestic violence still emphasises safety from physical and sexual violence.

A complication in the advances made in understanding women's experiences of domestic violence has been a competing body of literature that claims gender symmetry in the use of physical violence.

Gender symmetry

Despite the evidence claiming that the preponderance of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women (Kimmel, 2002), there has been a competing body of family conflict studies indicating that there is gender symmetry in the use of violence between intimate partners (Archer, 2000). Although these studies have been criticised for taking physical violence out of context of the pattern of abuse inherent to domestic violence, the competing notions of gender symmetry and gender asymmetry have created confusion for policy makers (Kimmel, 2002). Conversely, it has also brought the issue of women's use of physical violence into focus and the necessity to address rather than deny women's capacity for abuse. Stark, like many commentators, is concerned that this is not at the expense of 'targeting its specific contexts, motives and meaning' (Stark, 2007, p. 98), at least when researching women's use of violence against men.

Those researchers who advocate gender symmetry within domestic violence are accused of basing this on a soundly critiqued measurement tool called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) constructed by Straus in 1979. This is a survey instrument considered by many critics to simply measure a range of minor expressive violent acts, as opposed to the instrumental violence used to gain or maintain power and authority in relationships (Kimmel, 2002). For example, the opening paragraph of the CTS survey frames domestic violence as the result of an argument. This is in direct contrast to the research of women's experiences that finds domestic violence to be an experience of power and control:

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read some things that you and your spouse/partner might do when you have an argument. I would like you to tell me how many times...in the past 12 months you... (Straus, 1990, p. 33).

Laing (2008, p. 68) differentiates such mutual physical aggression from the 'imposition of a regime of coercive control', and argues that it is separate from the core dynamics of domestic violence. The use of surveys again limits the women's voices and an understanding of the context in which their violence occurred, such as resistance or retaliation, or even to save their own lives. Stark (2007) argues that the focus on discrete violent acts hides the fact that the larger context of abuse reflects a male oriented perspective on events.

However, this debate is one of the fundamental points of contention in the current domestic violence literature. It has reduced domestic violence yet again to physical violence and obscured the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon. The lobbying of father's rights and men's rights groups in Australia (for example, the Lone Fathers Association, the Men's Rights Agency, the Shared Parenting Council and Dads Against Discrimination) has influenced the recent family law reforms in Australia. These groups promote domestic violence as physical violence that is caused by marital discord (Flood, 2003).

Yet, this argument cannot dismiss statistics such as household and crime surveys, police statistics and hospital data which state that the majority of perpetrators of domestic violence are male and the victims female (Kimmel, 2002). Homicide and post-separation statistics further refute the notion of gender symmetry in violence. 'At the extreme end', states Jaffe et al. (2003, p. 7), 'the statistics are indisputable when violence results in death'. Kimmel (2002) posits that the gender symmetry found by CTS-based studies was possible because of the exclusion of context relating to the severity of injury, incidents of sexual assault, the presence of economic exploitation, social isolation, and post-separation physical or sexual violence.

Johnson's Typology

What looked to be an unsolvable debate around gender symmetry has found some resolution in research that demonstrates different types or patterns of intimate partner violence exist (Johnson, 2008). Johnson's Typology of Domestic Violence (2008) suggests that these can be differentiated by the level of control and physical violence. Conflict Motivated Violence refers to relationships where there is no control but there may be one incident, sporadic, or regular physical violence. A higher frequency/severity of physical violence but with no accompanying pattern of control is referred to by Johnson as Common Couple or Situational Couple Violence. The presence of high control and a higher frequency and severity of physical violence is referred to as Coercive Controlling Violence (a pattern described in Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p. 478 as 'emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence').

Coercive Controlling Violence is likely to explain the statistics in shelter and hospital data, for example, that consistently find the male to be the perpetrator of violence between heterosexual couples (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). However, as non-violent control tactics may be effective without the use of violence (often women describe one or two initial incidents in the relationship), it is a recent idea in Johnson's research that Coercive Controlling Violence can be understood as not necessarily manifesting itself in high levels of violence. An important addition to Johnson's typology is the recognition of relationships where there is high control but no violence, which he termed Incipient Coercive Control.

This research strongly suggests that male violence towards their intimate partners should not be relied upon as the only symptom or indicator of domestic violence. A pattern of coercion and control that needs to be disrupted for women and children post-separation must also be considered if women and children are to be protected.

Concluding comments

Early research inadvertently fragmented the experience of abuse and compromised the capacity to understand women's lived experience of domestic violence. Women were rarely asked to talk freely about the totality of their perceptions and experiences of their relationship. Facets such as their social and economic arrangements with their partner, their communication patterns and their physical and sexual relationship were not always taken into account. Since the 1990s, however, the conceptualising of domestic violence has increasingly focused on non-physical abuse and the dynamics of control. It has become increasingly apparent that it is necessary to understand these aspects of women's lived experience of domestic violence first in order to locate the role physical abuse and physical violence plays in the relationship.

The following section explores the research that focuses on the effects of domestic violence on women.

The Effects of Domestic Violence

The first section of the literature review focused on the complexity of domestic violence and how different conceptualisations change the way women's lived experiences are understood and responded to by professionals. Attention was drawn to an increasing emphasis in the literature on the role of non-physical abuse in domestic violence and the fact that it is equally devastating for women. While research that explores the dynamics of domestic violence is vital to inform effective socio-legal responses for the protection of women, successful intervention also needs to incorporate a comprehension of the effects on women of living with domestic violence. This section focuses on the research that investigates these effects. First, the significant and illustrative literature from the early research into the effects of physical and sexual violence is briefly discussed. Then a deeper exploration of the research that investigates the effects of psychological and emotional abuse is presented. This provides an essential context for the current study, as it presents the voices of women as they describe a range of harms caused by tactics other than physical violence. This is followed by a discussion of two specific aspects of

women's experiences: losing power, and being captured. Finally the section concludes with a brief discussion of the limitations of this area of research.

Physical and sexual violence

The early research on physical violence equated the effects of living in an oppressive and violent culture with being the cause of domestic violence. In countries where women were considered the legal property of men, they were held responsible as provoking or deserving any beatings and thus punished (Taft, 2003). With the evolution of the science of psychology, theories emerged which considered that the cause of women's abuse from their partners was women's masochism or other innate mental inadequacies. For example, women were considered by some mental and health professionals to need the abuse (Walker, 1984). Typical of this 'blame the victim' thinking is the study conducted in 1964 by Snell, Rosenfeld and Robey, titled 'The wife-beater's wife'. Herman (1992, p. 117) notes how this particular study reflects the idea that the experience of being battered fulfilled these 'frigid, passive, castrating or masochistic women's needs'. Specifically, when domestic violence was equated with physical violence and referred to as 'wife battering', it was understood within the medical model as a problem 'requiring detection, diagnosis and treatment' (Alexander, 2003, p. 231). Goodstein and Page (1981), for example, referred to it as a syndrome and a treatment dilemma for clinical psychiatry: 'The battering syndrome is not a disease per se because it cuts across socioeconomic and diagnostic categories' (Goodstein & Page, 1981, p. 1036). The difficulty women appeared to have in leaving violent relationships added weight to this approach.

Walker (1979), however, located the problem of women's health disorders as the consequence of the behaviour of their partner's abuse rather than the cause. Her findings suggested that complex psycho-social reasons other than masochism prevented the women from leaving. She developed the notion of the 'Battered Women's Syndrome' which sought to explain that women stayed with abusive men because they were rendered helpless and dependent by violence. The women Walker surveyed also described terror at the thought of leaving, fearing for their safety (Kelly, 2004). Pence and Paymar (1993) noted that even though the experience of

domestic violence for women had by then been recognised as constituting physical, psychological, sexual, emotional and spiritual domination that resulted in physical, psychological and spiritual trauma, it was still a community discourse that a woman was in that position because ‚something [was] wrong with her’ (Pence & Paymar, 1993, pp. 6-7).

The effects of physical and sexual violence

Despite the number of researchers that referred to the complex nature of abuse, in the late 1980s, the dominant image of domestic violence as physical and/or sexual violence was still reflected in the literature. The effects on women were considered to be physical and mental and requiring medical attention (Power, 1998). The safety of victims and holding offenders accountable was considered the relevant socio-legal response (Power, 1998).

The main consequences of domestic violence were considered to be injuries sustained from physical assaults or forced sex as well as sexually transmitted diseases (Campbell & Lewandoski, 1997). Conditions related to the effects of stress such as headaches, chronic pain and fatigue were also reported (Nicolaidis et al., 2004); psychological deterioration such as depression; and psychiatric symptoms such as PTSD (Golding, 1999) were acknowledged in some studies. Campbell and Lewandoski (1997) note additional health effects such as chronic headaches, abdominal and joint pains, muscle aches, increasing anxiety, chemical dependency, sexual dysfunction, sleeping and eating disorders and suicide attempts.

Thomas, Joshi, Wittenberg and McCloskey (2008, p. 1254) suggest that the standardised instruments used to assess abuse in these studies were unable to detect the ‚unique stressors inherent in abusive relationships that ultimately affect women’s health’. In avoiding women’s own descriptions of the way abuse affects their health, important contextual information was lost. Power (1998) suggests that the complexity of domestic violence is overlooked by reducing it to a set of signs and symptoms and predictive factors. This, she believes, prevents research on longer-term issues for women (Power, 1998, p. 26). Additionally, Stark’s (2007, p. 14) experience was that

„routine but minor physical violence’ could create effects on women just as devastating effects on women as those sustained from assaults that were life threatening. The severity of violence did not equate with the loss of autonomy and liberty experienced by the women in his practice:

... the women in my practice have repeatedly made it clear that what is done to them is less important than what their partners have prevented them from doing for themselves by appropriating their resources; undermining their social support; subverting their rights to privacy, self respect, and autonomy; and depriving them of substantive equality...coercive control is a liberty crime rather than a crime of assault... (Stark, 2007, p. 13).

In sum, research on the physical and mental health effects of domestic violence does not necessarily relate to women who experienced coercive control and a pattern of minor assaults or no physical violence at all.

The effects of psychological and emotional abuse

As already stated in the first section of this literature review, the absence of a common definition of psychological and emotional abuse within domestic violence has impacted on the research exploring the effect on women (Kelly, 2004). Many researchers believe that physical and mental health problems result from the physical violence women sustain from their partner (McKibbin, 1997). Thus few studies have investigated the effects of psychological and emotional abuse where there has not been physical violence.

Despite this gap, the importance of psychological abuse was noted in a number of studies that initially focused on physical abuse. A significant number of women reported perceiving psychological abuse as more damaging and painful than physical abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Follingstad et al., 1990; Walker, 1979). O’Leary (1999) also suggests that the effects of emotional abuse are often more damaging than those of physical abuse. NicCarthy (1986) described the erosion of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-concept that results from psychological abuse as slow to heal.

Again, this research is characterised by attempts to measure the effects of aspects of domestic violence or abuse as if they are discrete rather than interrelated. However, if psychological abuse is considered to only be one aspect of physical abuse, it is difficult to tell what the researcher is actually measuring with participants. McKibbin (1997) explains that because the interest in psychological abuse was derived from battered women, the logical approach has been to consider it as another form of dominance or control. Consequently the focus has been on psychological abuse as it accompanies or results from violence, assuming that both physical violence and psychological abuse derive from a desire to dominate and control a partner. She cites several authors (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Hilberman & Munson, 1977-78; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1984) as also arguing that the purpose of psychological abuse is to engender threat and reinforce the effects of violence, reminding victims that the violence could occur again. This threat is viewed by female victims as a powerful form of manipulation which a man successfully uses to obtain what he wants from a woman.

Qualitative studies on the effects on women of psychological and emotional abuse provide unanimous results on the women's loss of self-esteem, confidence and sense of self and an increase in self doubt. In 1998, Sleutal reviewed the qualitative research from the previous 15 years that looked at women's accounts of their experiences of abuse. She found a consistent pattern to how women viewed the emotional consequences of battering, and their descriptions of the process of leaving. Loss of self, identity, dignity and trust were common to the majority of participants in all the studies, as were the emotional consequences of guilt, shame, feelings of failure, inferiority and loss of confidence. Sleutal considered it particularly striking that women from multiple qualitative studies used an 'identical terminology of brainwashing, going crazy and being a prisoner' (Sleutal, 1998, p. 27). Women were consistent in likening the behaviours of their partners to that of a jailer, because of the use of controlling and isolating behaviour such as forcing the severing of contact with others. There was a clear indication within the studies reviewed by Sleutal that women described emotional abuse as worse than physical abuse. No studies,

however, were cited where there was an absence of physical assault but a pattern of coercion and control.

Yet, psychological abuse, as pointed out by Chang for example, occurs without the use of physical violence. I have selected the research of Chang (1996) and Hirigoyen (1998) as representative of the effects of psychological and emotional abuse without an emphasis on physical violence.

The fact that the issue of psychological abuse had received little attention apart from being an aspect of physically abusive relationships was raised by Chang in 1996. She was interested in the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of women in psychologically abusive marriages who were not necessarily experiencing physical abuse. From the women's descriptions of their 'external and internal realities and their perceptions of their experiences' (Chang, 1996, p. 3). Chang found some commonalities in how they experienced psychological abuse. She noted the physical and emotional effects of a psychologically abusive relationship as being: initial denial in order to protect her partner's image to herself and others; a loss of a sense of unique self because of the use of attacks and criticism and a lack of confirmation and support; adapting and trying to please her husband and a thwarting of her longings for emotional attachment, love and intimacy; and her wish for autonomy or self-realisation (Chang, 1996, p. 110). As the women lost their sense of self, they became depressed and anxious and exhibited physical responses of stress to the psychological abuse and use of non-physical strategies of power. Chang (1995) also refers to an interaction pattern within psychologically abusive relationships which she called the double bind: 'Paradox and contradiction are used to create instability and confusion' (Chang, 1995, p. 135). Chang describes the effects of a double bind relationship as always leaving the women in her study off balance, confused and unsure of themselves.

The idea that schizophrenia is at least partly caused by double binds within family communication patterns was introduced by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland in 1956. According to Gibney (2006, p. 55), a psychotherapist and family therapist,

Bateson et al. name a difficult interaction pattern that was capable of creating illness. Double binds demystify ‚unsolvable communication and existential knots’ within families’ interaction patterns. As well, Bateson et al. (1956) note that double binds work when one person has the power to define the operant context for the other, which is a feature of domestic violence. ‚Double binds’, states Gibney, ‚are still crazy making after all these years’ (Gibney, 2006, p. 55).

The consequences of a ‚seizure of power’ phase in emotional abuse are detailed by Hirigoyen (1998), a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and family therapist. She extrapolates her studies on victimology to the area of stalking and emotional abuse. Victimology, Hirigoyen states, was originally a branch of criminology and ‚analyses the causes and process of victimisation, its consequences and the rights of the victim’ (Hirigoyen, 1998, p. 9). She describes emotional abuse as psychic aggression that could destroy, or permanently alter to some extent, the psyche of a victim and defines it as ‚any abusive conduct, whether by words, looks, gestures, or in writing, that infringes upon the personality, the dignity, or the physical or psychical integrity of a person; also behaviour that endangers the employment of said person or degrades the climate of the workplace’ (Hirigoyen, 1998, p. 52).

Whilst Hirigoyen writes of the physical responses to the stress of abuse, she also addresses the consequences to the victim of the ‚seizure of power phase’, seeing these as being withdrawal, confusion, doubt and stress. Yet, despite her focus on the effects of emotional abuse without an emphasis on physical or sexual abuse, Hirigoyen reverts to theories of psychopathology to explain the reasons a woman tolerates such treatment in the first place. She argues that the victim should explore her infancy and childhood to understand why she tolerates and permits abusive control.

Unfortunately, research that focuses on why women ‚tolerate’ abuse has a negative impact for women. Such an emphasis on individual responsibility or pathology results in labels such as ‚neurotic’, ‚hysteric’, and a ‚hypochondriac’ (Stark et al., 1979) being applied to women suffering the effects of being emotionally abused.

Although the definitions of psychological and emotional abuse in these studies overlap with social, economic and verbal abuse, they all depict similar attitudes and behaviours exhibited by their partners and the effects of these on the women. In response to these similarities, a number of researchers including Ferraro and Johnson (1983), Landenberger (1989), Mills (1985), Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995), Wuest and Merritt-Gray, (1999 and 2001), Humphreys and Thiara (2003) and Smith, Tessaro and Earp (1995), focus specifically on the effects of losing power in a relationship through being trapped and victimised, as opposed to focusing on the effects of discrete types of abuse.

The effects of losing power

Despite the public acknowledgment of the existence of violence against women, Ferraro and Johnson (1983) joined the growing number of Western researchers concerned that it was not well understood. They were concerned that 'the bulk of sociological research on battered women has focused on quantifiable variables' (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983, p. 325). Kirkwood (1993) also argued that the quantification of emotional abuse, for example, was not as simple as physical abuse and the 'injuries that resulted could not be discussed in terms of degree or even permanency' (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 45).

Their qualitative research with women who had experienced being 'battered' reveals a process of losing power via victimisation, which was not synonymous with the experience of physical assault (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983, p. 334). Ferraro and Johnson (1983, p. 336) describe 'an emotional career of victimisation' which includes 'not only cognitive interpretations, but feelings and physiological responses'. Emotional distress with confusion, despair, guilt and shame, loss of confidence, long lasting feelings of inferiority and depression were common to this emotional career. An overwhelming sense of fear was described as being experienced physiologically as well as emotionally. Ferraro and Johnson (1983) are careful to distinguish between the process of victimisation and assuming the identity of a victim. They also identify the similarities between domestic violence and other processes of victimisation such as street crime, political violence and corruption.

The processes of entrapment and recovery from an abusive relationship were noted by Landenburger (1989). This study included a qualitative analysis of a random sample of interviews with women who had experienced domestic violence. The process of entrapment consists of ‚four phases which are not necessarily linear or mutually exclusive’ (Landenburger, 1993, p. 379). The binding phase is characterised by subconsciously overlooking the bad, a desire for a loving relationship, ignoring warning signals, working on the relationship and questioning herself and the relationship. The enduring phase involves consciously blocking out the bad, focusing on a solution to the abuse, taking responsibility, placating, mental anguish, covering up and a shrinking of self. The disengaging phase includes labelling the abuse, seeking help, reaching a breaking point and rediscovering an emerging self. The recovering phase is characterised by a struggle for survival, grieving, and a search for meaning.

Landenburger’s research is comparable to Mills (1985) who found that the women in her study described similar experiences. An open interviewing style was used with 10 women who had used a shelter. Mills came to the conclusion that there was a gradual process of victimisation involving five chronological stages: ‚entering a violent relationship, managing the violence, experiencing a loss of self, re-evaluating the violent relationship, and restructuring the self’ (Mills, 1985, p. 103).

A feminist, grounded theory study was conducted by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) with 13 English-speaking ‚survivors of abusive conjugal relationships’ residing in rural eastern Canada. Their findings strongly resemble the stages of Landenburger’s (1989) and Mills (1985) but are conceptualized as a spiral

The central social-psychological process the women were engaged in was described as reclaiming self, a voyage depicted in four stages and presented as. Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) explain the first two of these stages: counteracting abuse and breaking free. Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) describe the process of not going back and Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001) focus on the final stage of the process, moving on.

Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) explain the three concomitant sub processes of the counteracting abuse phase as: ‚relinquishing parts of self, minimising abuse, and fortifying defences’. These sub-processes ‚interacted and influenced each other over time through a number of turning points as the woman moved toward breaking free (Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995, 402). Attention is drawn to the fact that although the women were abused, they refused from the beginning to surrender and actively counteracted it.

The sub process of relinquishing self is compared by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) to Landenburger’s (1993) notion of a ‚shrinking of self’ and Mills (1985) idea of a loss of identities. Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) make the important point that the women in their study had held on to parts of themselves. Minimising abuse described how the women ‚developed strategies of protecting, reasoning, and fighting back’ (Merritt and Wuest, 1995, 405). In this stage, the women reported that they could be as emotionally abusive as their partners. They would threaten, call police, press charges, return the abuse and protect the children. Whereas these strategies may have minimised the abuse to some extent, the critical point made by the women was that the abuse never stopped. Fortifying mechanisms involved ‚surviving the abuse while getting ready to break free’ (Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995, 406).

Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) focused on the ‚not going back’ phase and uncovered two sub processes; claiming and maintaining territory (necessary to protect physical and emotional territory from their ex-partner) and relentless justifying (explaining their situation to themselves and others). Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001) focused on the ‚moving on’ stage which consisted of figuring it out, putting it (the abuse) in its rightful place, launching new relationships, and taking on a new image, a process which takes place over a period of years. Parallels can be drawn between Landenburger’s ‚search for meaning’ phase and the ‚moving on’ stage.

These three important articles successfully capture the stages through which women recognise, address and move on from the abuse they experience in their relationships. Wuest and Merritt-Gray firstly emphasise the women as ‚survivors’ rather than as

„victims’ of the abuse they encountered in their relationship. They add a further dimension to the literature that began to focus on the strengths of women in abusive relationship as opposed to their oppression (Campbell, 1992) and further support the emerging view of women’s resilience and courage (Campbell et al., 1994) in the face of such oppression. However, Wuest and Merritt-Gray take this a step further and caution that such terminology as „survivor’ can also limit the woman when she is in the process of moving on (Wuest and Merritt-Gray, 2001, 91).

Attention was also drawn by Smith, Tessaro and Earp (1995) to the importance of capturing the continuous, chronic experience of victimisation rather than acute, discrete acts of physical assault or emotional or psychological abuse. They noted the increased interest in the research to the process of losing power and used focus groups to explore the feelings and meanings women associated with their experiences of domestic violence.

Similar to this study, they were interested in what needed to be understood about an experience in order to classify it as one of battering, as well as „conceptualising battering as a chronic experience not necessarily synonymous with being assaulted by a partner’ (Smith et al., 1995, p. 175). Smith et al. developed a framework of the women’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours which they called the Women’s Experiences with Battering (WEB) Framework. It comprises a circle divided into six domains describing the key effects of living with domestic violence. These are: perceived threat, altered identity, managing, entrapment, yearning and disempowerment (Smith et al., 1995, p. 175). Each domain is explained as co-existing and interrelated and reflects a woman’s experience of losing power and control in interaction with her partner:

The web framework suggests the need for a broad range of medical, public health and criminal justice interventions that penetrate battered women’s isolation, disrupt the disempowerment process and challenge their altered negative identity (Smith et al., 1995, p.181).

The idea that women’s sense of self was eradicated by the „intimate terrorism’ referred to by Ferraro and Johnson (2000) was also noted by Humphreys and Thiara

(2003a). In 2002, Humphreys and Thiara interviewed 180 women using questionnaires with some qualitative responses as well as conducting in-depth interviews with 20 women to explore more general problems arising from the response of mental health professionals. They linked domestic violence to women's severe emotional distress and argued that the well-documented experiences of women with depression, post-traumatic stress and self-harm were effects of living with violence and abuse rather than the cause. Humphreys and Thiara (2003a) also agreed with the suggestions made by Cascardi, O'Leary and Schlee (1999) that women who experience depression may have had their sense of self eroded by their partner's strategies. They note how the participants interviewed in 2002 had their belief in themselves undermined by the controlling tactics they experienced from their partners as well as being blamed and held responsible for the abuse. They also spoke of being threatened, overwhelmed by fear and loss of a sense of safety, suffering disturbing flashbacks, panic attacks, high anxiety and hyper-vigilance, and feeling trapped and caged. Six of the women spoke of suicide attempts.

The dynamics of domestic violence have also been compared to the experience of oppression and control in contexts such as cults, prisoners of war camps, hostage situations, the sex industry and organisations. This comparison allows the consequences or effects of living with oppression in these contexts to be linked to the experiences of women living within domestic violence. Singer (1979) whose background is in coercive persuasion, studied cult phenomena and observed that the recruitment tactics used by cults to attract new members were highly sophisticated and there were intense influence procedures to keep them. If this wasn't understood, an ex-cultist's behaviour could be misinterpreted as psychopathological. Thinking of women in domestic violence as victims of capture crimes helps reframe the dynamics of their relationship and therefore their behaviour as reactions or responses to such tactics.

It is clear that strong links have been established in the research between control and domination and the process of losing power. However, there are a number of criticisms of this body of research. First, there appears to be little discussion of the

central role of emotional and psychological abuse in the processes of loss of power and entrapment.

Second, the language of effects used by the clinical and research literature on interpersonal violence is problematic. Similar to Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995), Wade (2000), suggests that this language misrepresents the victims as submissive and that the ways in which a person resisted and responded to abuse are concealed by a focus on the effects of abuse: „What transforms victims’ resistance and other responses into problems, and problems into symptoms, is precisely their representation as effects. The language of effects constructs the victim as a passive site of damage’ (Todd & Wade, 2003, p. 152). This suggests that any attempt to identify the overall dynamics of domestic violence or to unpack an incident of abuse is deficient unless the woman’s responses and resistances are acknowledged as being positive and constructive ways to escape or improve their circumstances.

Third is the problem focus of much of the research. Although the research makes clear the emotional and psychological deterioration inherent to losing power in a relationship where a male attempts ‚to co-opt and deconstruct a woman’s personhood’ (Stark, 2007, p. 216), the indications that women may strongly resist and oppose such co-opting in a variety of ways is often overlooked (Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995). Perceiving women who experience domestic violence as their partner’s hostages suggests they lack the opportunity to escape or otherwise act effectively on their own behalf, rather than lacking the will to do so. Yet, resisting behaviour can be overlooked by either professionals or practitioners who subscribe to individually pathologising discourses (Stark, 2007) and have an inadequate conceptualisation of domestic violence.

Finally, research on the effects of domestic violence tends to divide it into discrete, easily measurable sections that do not reflect women’s overall affective, behavioural and cognitive responses to the loss of power inherent in a pattern of coercive control. The broader implications of the reduction in life chances and the losses implicit in being denied equality are also overlooked.

Concluding comments

The majority of the studies on the effects of domestic violence address the physical and psychological effects of physical violence, with the result that many women are not represented by this research. Women who did not experience physical violence but were trapped by their partner's patterned use of coercive control are also neglected. Not all women experience assault or abuse in ways that will induce trauma or other effects. Indeed, Stark comments that „most victims of abuse do not develop significant psychological or behavioural problems' (Stark, 2007, p. 12).

The research on the effects of non-physical abuse consistently identifies the erosion of a woman's sense of self and emotional distress and the cognitive and emotional effects of being dominated and controlled. Yet the literature is limited and the effects of coercive control irrespective of physical violence are not yet clear. Further, if domestic violence is reconceptualised as placing equal emphasis on the dynamics and effects of non-physical aspects of coercive control, the concomitant reduction in life chances that must occur as a consequence needs also to be considered. From this perspective, the inevitable economic exploitation, social isolation, oppressive communication, defamation or sexual subjugation of women that is inherent in a pattern of coercive control, irrespective of the presence of physical violence, should be understood as integral to the effects of domestic violence. These dynamics of domestic violence potentially create a myriad of losses in a woman's life, such as a loss of intimacy, social resources, voice, security, safety, status, reciprocity and autonomy.

The next section focuses on the post-separation shared parenting research.

Post-separation Shared Parenting

This final section of the literature review addresses the context of and research on women's experience of domestic violence post-separation when involved in shared parenting arrangements with their ex-partner. The manner in which domestic violence is conceptualised also affects the post-separation research. As a result, the first part of

this section focuses on the nature and extent of post-separation physical violence. This is followed by a brief discussion of the literature that suggests women are also likely to be affected by the tactics of power and control wielded by their ex-partners post-separation. The inadequacy of the legal system to address the consequences for women of separating from a relationship where they have experienced domestic violence is then addressed. The research conveys that the significance to the women of their experience of domestic violence is either overlooked or obscured in the court process. Several studies investigating the difficulties associated with supervised contact in child contact centres are presented, followed by a brief discussion of the challenges for women who negotiate unsupervised shared parenting agreements. The gaps in the literature are discussed, in particular the lack of information on the experiences of shared parenting for women in the years following the negotiation of Family Court issues and the experiences of women who could not legally substantiate physical violence by their ex-partner.

Post-separation violence

An Australian survey titled *Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women* (Office of the Status of Women, 1995) reported that 77 per cent of respondents found it difficult to comprehend why women stayed in violent relationships. The predominant belief was that women's lives would be improved if they simply ended the relationship and separated from their partner. It was commonly believed that although separating would end the abuse, many women didn't leave (Hardesty, 2002). Yet, an Australian study by Wallace (1986) reported that between 1968 and 1981, 45 per cent of the 217 women in New South Wales who were murdered by their husbands were either in the process of leaving their partner, or had actually left.

Later research began to challenge victim blaming and the role of individual pathology and illuminated the wider social and political contexts of violence against women. Attention was drawn to the high risk that women and children encountered to their safety post-separation as well as during the relationship (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002, 2003a, 2003b). An attempt to leave a violent partner, with children, came to be understood as risking severe violence and even death (Websdale, 1999).

There is now substantial Australian and international evidence to indicate that in relationships characterised by domestic violence, particularly where this has been equated with physical abuse, the prevalence, nature and gravity of the violence may increase during the process of and months following separation (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997; Humphreys, 1999; Kurz, 1996; Mahoney, 1991; Sev'er, 1997; Sheenan & Smyth, 2000; and Wilson & Daly, 1993). Recent Australian data suggests that in a context of domestic violence and separation, 75 mothers and children are killed by husbands and fathers each year (Mouzos & Rushforth, 2003). As well, a lack of appropriate socio-legal support and judicial response was noted as exacerbating the vulnerability of women and children to male violence (Bourget, Cagne & Moami, 2000; Hotton, 2001; Humphreys, 1999; Patton, 2003; Patton, 2005; Wuest & Merrit-Grey, 1999).

Early research on post-separation abuse by males refers to two peak periods where the woman may be subject to further physical violence because of challenges to male hegemony. The first is during the first few months of separation which Weiss referred to as the ‚crisis stage’ (Weiss, cited in Ellis, 1992, p. 186). Spanier and Casto (1979) refer to this stage as ‚the adjusting to the dissolution phase’ and describe that in addition to this is a second peak period between 18 and 24 months post-separation: ‚the setting up a new lifestyle phase’ when it becomes apparent to the ex-partner that the woman is making changes for a future without him (Spanier & Casto, 1979). Any accomplishments such as employment or a university course, for example, represent the woman creating a future without him (Ellis, 1992, p. 186).

However, in a study by McMahon and Pence (1995), it became clear that the period of greatest risk for women who had left a violent relationship was when issues of child custody and contact were being negotiated. Women also reported that abuse in some form, such as physical, emotional or sexual, would occur at handovers from unsupervised and even supervised contact with children (Humphreys & Thiara, 2002; Radford, Hester, Humphreys & Woodfield, 1997). These findings have been supported by several researchers (for example, Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Mahoney, 1991; Wilson & Daly, 1993). They argue that post-separation violence is related to a

loss of power and control, issues of revenge, perceived betrayal, jealousy and challenges to male hegemony. Such causes for male violence concur with research that addresses the reasons for actual homicide against female partners (Brewster, 2003; Wilson & Daly, 1993).

Post-separation power and control

More recent research indicates that post-separation abuse involves more than physical violence, particularly where women are facilitating child contact (Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Edleson, 2004; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). For example, the fact that separation assault was driven by the abuser's need for power and control was proposed by Sev'er (1997): „Separations, especially when initiated by women, challenge the foundation of a male bastion: his power and control within the home' (Sev'er, 1997, p. 572). She developed a modified model of the power and control wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) that applies specifically to separation assault. The model is a circle divided into four domains, each labelling a form of separation-related abuse. These are: escalated intimidation; using children and other loved ones; economic and legal abuse; and coercion, threats, and explosive violence. The hub of the circle is power and control, and the rim of the circle is physical and sexual violence. Sev'er's hypothesis is that tactics from each domain could be used to control women post-separation. These tactics could escalate and snowball very quickly and could extend to the women's friends and family as well.

As well as attempting to explicate the dynamics of domestic violence from a woman's point of view, Walker also draws clear links between the dynamics of domestic violence and post-separation legal proceedings: „the batterer views his children, like his wife, as possessions, and frequently uses them to get back at her. The women tell of being constantly threatened by the men to fight for legal custody...' (Walker, 1984, p. 145).

The issues of power and control were further explored by Humphreys and Thiara (2002). One hundred and eighty women completed questionnaires and 20 women were interviewed. All were subject to severe physical and emotional violence that

was recognised as being part of a pattern of ‚intimate terrorism’ or coercive controlling violence (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). It was extremely difficult for the women to achieve separation. Less than 24 per cent of the women separated without being subject to verbal and emotional abuse. This included being subjected to serious threats by their ex-partners to kill, rape, abduct the children, commit suicide, and harm new partners, family members, neighbours or family pets. Many experienced physical assault, financial abuse and sexual violence. This research also cites women’s experiences of being abused by their ex-partners at work, being followed, run off the road, reported to child protection authorities and threatened with making their sexuality public (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003b, p. 201). Some women received threats to undermine their claims for residency in Australia and abusive letters from prison. Other women reported their ex-partners as enlisting other people to participate in the abuse.

Humphreys and Thiara (2003b) also describe intrusive behaviour which they call the ‚charm offensive’; a confusing pattern of behaviour, as it ‚falls within dominant discourses of romance and courtship’ (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003b, p. 202). It is characterised by courting behaviour (letters, phone calls, flowers) coupled with apologies and promises to change. But at the same time, the women were blamed by their ex-partners for causing the violence and abuse and made to feel guilty for being the one who was responsible for undermining the family and depriving the children of a father.

Despite these compelling studies, the implications of this research have remained obscured in the current culture of shared parenting, and have not been applied to women who do not appear to be in danger of physical violence.

Negotiating the justice system

The tendency to overlook the significance of physical violence by partners in decisions of the Family Court was raised by the Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, the Honourable Justice Alastair Nicholson, in 1995. However, the continuing lack of appropriate socio-legal support and judicial response was noted as

exacerbating the vulnerability of women and children to male violence in a number of studies since then (Bourget, Cagne & Moami, 2000; Hotton, 2001; Humphreys, 1999; Patton, 2005; Wuest & Merrit-Grey, 1999).

The majority of the research concerning women's experiences of post-separation physical violence is clearly focused on the inadequacy of family law and legislation practices. In particular, a number of studies explore the experiences of women who have to navigate the Family Law Court in order to contest their ex-partner's fight for legal custody despite a context of domestic violence (for example, Hay, 2003; Jaffe et al., 2003; Kaye, Stubbs & Tolmie, 2003a, 2003b; Kernic, Monary-Ernsdorff, Koepsell & Holt, 2005).

The difficulties that women have in authenticating domestic violence to the standard required for judicial intervention or to convince professionals are well documented (Humphreys & Holder, 2002). Evidentiary rules place the burden of proof onto the victims rather than the abusers (Kernic et al., 2005). However, the majority of women who experience domestic violence do not report it to the police and are unable to provide the required evidence (Tjadan & Thoennes, 2000). This focus on an incident/injury conceptualisation of domestic violence fails to address other patterns of abuse inherent in domestic violence, such as the dynamics of coercive control. From the point of view of the safety and wellbeing of the mothers and children, this creates great distress post-separation. As pointed out by Saunders (1994), if a parent had used a pattern of control and domination whilst in the relationship, this was unlikely to revert to an egalitarian style towards post-separation parenting issues. Humphreys and Thiara (2002, p. 195) argue that the ongoing oppression of women is facilitated post-separation by the „contradictions and complexities in the practice of the law'. For example, they describe poor law enforcement, ineffective civil protection orders and inadequate prosecution as leaving women without adequate protection against post-separation violence around child contact.

The qualitative research by Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie (2003) has been chosen to reflect in more detail the research on the difficulty for women with children accessing

support in the legal system in the aftermath of domestic violence. Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie (2003b) took a two- pronged approach to child contact arrangements and domestic violence in Australia. They used semi-structured interviews to examine the degree to which professionals working in the area of family law had understandings and assumptions that matched those of the 40 women interviewed. Seven of these women had been separated for more than six years yet domestic violence, namely physical violence, remained of concern to them.

Of the 40 women interviewed, eight had privately negotiated arrangements with their ex-partner for unsupervised child contact. Kaye et al. surmise that this: ‚may reflect a lack of access to the formal legal system and/or fear of the possible repercussions of seeking external assistance rather than a positive choice by the parties’ (Kaye et al., 2003b, p. 79). One woman reported amicable arrangements with one of her ex-partners but not the other. The other seven women were in fear of their ex-partners and could not assert their own needs. For all 40 women, experiences of intimidation, harassment and fear during private or court negotiations of child contact were common. Of the 35 women who were resident parents facilitating contact with their father, only five had not experienced violence at a contact changeover. These five women still experienced intimidating or frightening behaviour that was also distressing to the children. Contact was noted for giving the ex-partners license to stalk the women, threaten to physically or sexually assault them, threaten to suicide, murder or kidnap the children, and use verbally abusive and harassing behaviour in person or by phone. Two-thirds of the women who were resident parents described parenting practices that they considered inappropriate or neglectful and even dangerous to the child’s health and well-being. Furthermore, the children witnessed the behaviour of their father at handovers or were involved in the aggression (Kaye et al., 2003b, p. 127). A concern common to the women was the difficulty in managing the reactions their children had to handovers, or the disturbed and unsettled behaviour of the children after contact.

Kaye et al. (2003b) found that most of the professionals they interviewed were under the assumption that violence against the mother was a separate issue from the well-

being of the child. Many were not aware of the complex and difficult situation the mother was in. As well, there lacked a united response as to whether it was appropriate for the women to facilitate contact between the children and their father in the context of domestic violence although there was a recognition of the factors that may pressure woman to do so despite their concerns.

The difficulties for women in providing evidence of a pattern of coercive control irrespective of the experience of physical violence have not been addressed in the literature on post-separation shared parenting. The longer-term consequences for women of having their experience of physical violence or coercive control minimised when negotiating shared parenting arrangements are also unknown.

Supervised contact

In response to the pro-contact philosophy of the Family Court and concerns about the impact on children of the absence of fathers in the post-divorce literature, there was a rapid growth in child contact centres in Western industrialised countries such as Australia, the US, Britain and Canada. These centres were designed to provide a safe place for supervised contact. Women's experiences of supervised contact facilitated by child contact centres has been the focus of post-separation domestic violence research (for example, Aris, Harrison & Humphreys, 2002; Kaye et al., 2003b, Stubbs & Tolmie, 2003; Kernic, et al., 2005; Parker et al., 2008; Rhoades & Boyd, 2004; Rosen & Sullivan, 2005; Strategic Partners Ltd, 1998). Much of the research regarding the effects of domestic violence on women and children also considers the impact on children of supervised contact and competes with and challenges the pro-contact philosophy that has dominated policy and legislation in the last decade.

The qualitative research findings of Harrison (2008) address the perspectives and experiences of women around the issue of supervised access. She argues that the experience of post-separation violence and high levels of fear about custody or contact indicate poor outcomes for children. Her study corresponds with earlier research (Hester & Radford, 1996; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003b; Wilcox, 2000) that found „the law facilitated the man's capacity to continue abuse rather than curtailing

it...a significant group of women suffered chronic post-separation violence who currently fail to receive either justice or protection' (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003b, p. 209).

The women in Harrison's (2008) study felt that if they wanted to be seen as prioritising their children's interests, they were expected to promote contact irrespective of whether the father had been violent. If they objected to this, they risked being accused of 'parental alienation' (making false allegations, or setting the children against their father to sabotage the children's contact). Under the current family law reforms in Australia, this can result in the loss of legal custody for a mother. The minimisation of domestic violence and the denial of allegations by their partners, even when charged, put the women in an invidious position. They reported being unhappy with having to comply with arrangements between their children and ex-partners that were at their expense. Few women felt confident to elevate their concerns because they were aware that they could be imprisoned for not complying with contact orders. Their fears and anxieties from previous or continuing violence were difficult to convey to legal and welfare professionals and they felt judged and unsupported.

Where domestic violence is reduced to 'conflict between parents' the position of mothers and their concerns for the children can be overlooked by professionals or misinterpreted as part of this conflict. The 'disaggregating what they euphemistically described as "conflict between parents" from the needs and interests of the children ... meant that men's potential to be good fathers was routinely evaluated or assumed without any reference to their responsibility for violence' (Harrison, 2008, p. 397). In the majority of centres covered by Harrison's research, there was limited assessment of fathers' parenting skills or the likelihood of continued domestic violence. She found little evidence of direct work to improve either parenting or safety. Therefore, contact at a centre failed to address harm and appeared to impede the recovery of some women and children from the experience of domestic violence. Another point of concern was that the women respondents drew attention to the short-term nature of contact centres and the tension regarding the inevitable transition to unsupervised

contact. If supervised visitation was of concern to women, then the ability of the women to manage post-separation abuse without a buffer such as the contact centre is highlighted.

In Harrison's (2008) study, as in all the research on supervised contact, supervised visitation was ordered because of a court order in response to a pattern of physical violence rather than acknowledgement of a pattern of control and deprivation of liberty and autonomy. Women who are unable or achieve legal validation for a pattern of physical violence therefore have no voice in this literature.

The issues and difficulties likely to be experienced by women when negotiating shared parenting arrangements with their ex-partners when using a Supervised Visitation Centre (SPV) were also raised by Parker et al. (2008). They noted that in their experience of running a SPV, they were 'consistently surprised and awed by the battering tactics we witnessed ... within a month of opening our doors, we realised how easily our program could become part of the batterer's methods to control his victim, despite our extensive experience and training...' (Parker et al., 2008, p.1317). This points to the unacknowledged fears of women in both supervised and unsupervised shared parenting arrangements and contradicts the perception that women who are reluctant to facilitate child contact are being uncooperative or alienating the children from their father.

Focus group and case study reports illuminate the opportunities for ongoing abuse of women and children provided by joint custody or visitation arrangements (Henderson, 1990; Shalansky, Ericksen & Henderson, 1999). The use of threats, and physical and emotional abuse, has been described by women in shared parenting arrangements as leading them to relinquish their rights, including legal rights (Kernic et al., 2005). Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung and Smith (2005) point out that even when women have full custody of the children, a batterer can continue to exert control during visits with the children.

Unsupervised shared parenting

Shalansky, Erickson and Henderson (1999) are representative of the small body of literature that addresses unsupervised shared parenting. They write that although it has been revealed within the theoretical literature how custody and access can facilitate an ex-partner's ability to continue abusive behaviour, the research on how custody and access issues affect abused women is scarce and 'key details about this phenomenon are not known' (Shalansky et al., 1999, p. 416). Shalansky et al. interviewed six single mothers sharing either custody or unsupervised access arrangements with abusive former partners because of court imposed custody and access orders. Access visits ranged between 50 per cent of the week to once a week. They used an unstructured, non-directive manner to explore the women's experiences. They found that the women's fear of leaving their partners because of possible repercussions had become a reality. The women describe living in physical and psychological fear because of their ex-partners' continued use of harassment, control, manipulation and abuse. Universal to each woman was the need to escape as the only way to find safety for themselves and the children. However, despite having sole custody, their freedom to move when it involved taking children away from their fathers was limited (Shalansky et al., 1999).

The persistent stress and uncertainty prevented the women and their children from being able to break free of their abusive ex-partners, move forward and heal from the effects of the dynamics of domestic violence. They felt their futures were defeated because of the realities of the custody laws and their ex-partner's relentless determination to prevent them from ever truly separating. As the women in this study were all in the process of negotiating custody and access with their ex-partner, Shalansky et al. (1999) suggest a focus is warranted on the issues women experience when living with shared parenting arrangements for more than five years. However, as Shalansky's research suffered from a lack of clear definition of 'domestic abuse', it is likely that the research focus was on women who had experienced physical violence.

Despite differences in the methodology, sample size or definition of domestic violence, the research on women's experiences of post-separation shared parenting tell a similar story of being unable to escape their partner's domination and control. The research that focuses on women's experience of unsupervised shared parenting with a 'substantiated' history of domestic violence does not include the experiences of women who could not legally substantiate physical violence. Those women who did not experience physical violence, or experienced a pattern of infrequent or even frequent minor assaults, are also marginalised in this research. There is a need to include such women in studies which identify the trajectories of post-separation shared parenting when there has been a history of coercive control as opposed to physical violence, as this would inform the socio-legal responses to and support for families over time (Hardesty & Chung, 2006).

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

A focus on physical violence post-separation, both in the legislation and the literature, contradicts the advances made in understanding the core dynamics of domestic violence as being non-physical, and comparable to the coercive techniques employed by cults, pimps, and hostage-takers, for example. Such an expanded conceptualisation of domestic violence has direct implications for understanding the dynamics of relationships post-separation, understanding the role of physical violence plays within these dynamics, and addressing the needs of the population of women and children in shared parenting arrangements in Australia. This qualitative study aims to further develop knowledge of the dynamics of domestic violence and contribute to an understanding of how these dynamics impact on shared parenting experiences for women, irrespective of whether they had experienced physical violence.

The next chapter details the research design and methodology of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the different approaches towards identifying domestic violence were discussed. Although domestic violence was initially equated with episodes of physical violence, an emphasis in the feminist literature on women's lived experience drew attention to more complex patterns of abuse. The post-separation shared parenting research, however, primarily focuses on women who have experienced physical violence from their partners. This research tends to overlook the 'complex nature of a relationship in which violence is perpetuated' (Power, 1998, p. 21) and excludes the post-separation shared parenting experiences of women who were subjected to a pattern of abuse that may have included a more minor pattern of physical violence if any at all. This chapter describes the research design and methodology used in this study in order to address this gap.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section the methodological framework is presented. The second section addresses the sampling methods used to recruit participants. In the third section, the approach to and issues raised from the face-to-face interviews are discussed. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and the physical and emotional safety of the participants and the researcher are outlined in the fourth section. The final section details the process of data analysis.

Methodological Framework

This exploratory study was based on both the phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994) and feminist paradigms (Reinharz, 1992), as they 'reject positivist assumptions of a single reality...', and, '...recognise the primacy of women's lived experiences while locating them in the socio cultural context' (Eiskovits, Buchbinder & Mor, 1998, p. 416). Epistemologically, this study has accepted the constructionist view that 'meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world' (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9). From this standpoint, meaning comes out of 'an interplay' between subject and object (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). On a theoretical level, this

study has been influenced by social and radical feminist theory as well as structural social work theory and anti-oppressive practice (Mullaly, 2002; Weeks, 2003). This section outlines the methodological framework for this inquiry and the argument for using a qualitative feminist standpoint for research on domestic violence.

Feminist theory and research

Feminist research is committed to correcting the ‘invisibility and distortion of female experience’ (Lather, 1991, p. 71) in a patriarchal society. Feminist theorists view the world as made up of historically situated structures that impact on the life chances of individuals (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). Structural feminism asserts that female oppression is embedded in the social structures of patriarchal societies (Wearing, 1986, p. 47).

Social structures are entities such as the family, the legal system, parliament and the church. Rowland and Klein define patriarchy as:

...a system of structures and institutions created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination. Such structures include: institutions such as the law, religion and the family; ideologies which perpetuate the ‘naturally’ inferior position of women; socialisation processes to ensure that women and men develop behaviour and belief systems appropriate to the powerful or less powerful group to which they belong...(cited in Bell & Klein, 1996, p.15).

A feminist approach is therefore based on a belief that the structure of society does not provide a ‘level playing field’ for women (Gilmore, 2002, p. 91). The centrality of the social construction of gender to studying and changing ‘the condition of women in sexist society’ is paramount (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 12). Olesen (2003, p. 333) draws attention to the fact that although there is a lack of a global or unified feminism, qualitative feminist research ‘centres and makes problematic women’s diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame those situations’.

The basic tenets of feminist research emphasise the need to challenge and revise traditional research methods. A central argument is summed up by Harding and Norberg (2005):

that ‘conventional standards for ‘good research’ discriminate against or empower specific social groups no less than do the policies of legal, economic,

military, educational, welfare and health care institutions; in fact, these standards actually enable the practices of these institutions (Harding & Nordberg, 2005, p. 2009).

Feminist concerns with methodology and epistemology prioritise 'studying up'. This refers to studying the institutions, policies, and practices of the powerful instead of whom they govern: 'By studying up researchers can identify the conceptual practices of power and how they shape daily social relations' (Harding & Norberg, 2005, p. 2011).

Characteristic of feminist scholarship was the identification in the 1970s of the absence of a discussion of violence against women in the mainstream scientific literature (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist theory provided the most significant and useful explanations of domestic violence in the focus upon broader structural, class and gender inequalities (Coorey, 1988). Weeks (2003) describes a feminist social work framework as:

...resting on a feminist analysis of social issues which emphasise women's experiences and names experiences hitherto shrouded in silence, such as... violence in intimate adult relationships... (Weeks, 2003, p. 108).

Bograd (1988) believes the four common dimensions to conceptualising violence against women through a feminist lens are:

1. The explanatory utility of the constructs of gender and power;
2. The analysis of the family as a historically situated social institution;
3. The crucial importance of understanding and validating women's experiences; and
4. Employing scholarship for women (Bograd, 1988, pp. 13-14).

Feminist research, however, has raised intense criticism from those who advocate a gender neutral understanding and practice framework for domestic violence. Non-feminists tend to make counter claims of the capacity for and perpetration of violence by women against men and children as well as noting men's experience of other forms of violence (Gilmore, 2002).

Whereas this study focuses attention on the experience of women, the possibilities or types of abuse and violence that are experienced by men and children, or in fact are perpetrated by women, are also acknowledged. However, the intention in this study is to draw attention to a specific experience of abuse and violence, in particular where it was perpetrated by men towards their intimate partners and with whom they had or have a post-separation relationship because of children.

This study refutes a gender neutral approach to domestic violence and regards it as a gender and power issue that involves the oppression of women by their male partners. Violence against women is a complex phenomenon and feminist theory has drawn attention to the critical need to hear the voices of the women who have experienced it in order to provide appropriate services and support (Patton, 2005). Feminist theory views violence against women as being particular and ‘different in its form, nature, incidence and extent’ from other forms of violence (Gilmore, 2002, p. 91). At the core of a feminist research project is its educative and action-based focus (Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986) and a commitment to exploring a female point of view. To explore the experiences of women affected by the complex phenomenon of domestic violence, one school of feminism – standpoint feminism – has been chosen to be the guiding framework for this research.

Feminist standpoint theory

Women’s culture, history, and lives have remained ‘underground and invisible’, relegated to the ‘underside’ of men’s culture, history, and lives... (Nielsen, 1990, p. 10).

Nielsen’s comment captures the feminist intention to not only counter the description of the world from the point of view of men, but also a feminist concern for a tendency by men to confuse this with ‘absolute truth’ (de Beauvoir, 1972, p. 161). MacKinnon (1987) proposes that the political state is male in the sense that ‘the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women’ (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 169). Similarly, Naffine (1996) in her application of feminism to criminology notes that standpoint theorists believe:

...It is important for women to have a voice in interpreting their behaviour as opposed to having it decided by beliefs and sanctions that do not include women's experience. The legal definition of prostitution, pornography, domestic abuse and rape is not proved by the harm inflicted to women, rather men's understandings of those acts...their experiences are never allowed to set the defining conditions of the realist project (Naffine, 1996, p.66).

The exclusion of women's experience and reality has been challenged by feminist research. A number of feminist researchers identify with a particular feminist standpoint epistemology in which the world is viewed through the 'eyes and experiences of oppressed women' and the 'vision and knowledge of oppressed women is applied to social activism and social change' (Brooks, 2007, p. 55).

In the American social work literature, it is argued that the use of feminist standpoint theory is advantageous for social work practice and research because of its ability to challenge male hegemony (van Wormer, 2009). This theory has been described by Swigonsky (1994) as a stance compatible with social work, as it can address those who are oppressed or at the margins of society in order to enhance their dignity and worth. She claims that the basic tenet of standpoint theory is that the experience of reality of the less powerful members of society is different as a consequence of their oppression (Swigonski, 1994). Other feminist scholars and researchers using this approach also argue that women's experiences offer insight into the 'mechanisms of domination' in order to create a better way to live (Jaggar, 1997, p. 193). This is founded on the idea of 'double consciousness'.

Double consciousness

A key aspect of standpoint theory is the acknowledgement of the capacity of an oppressed group's 'double consciousness or double vision' (Brooks, 2007). This refers to a heightened awareness of the lives of any dominant group by any oppressed group, whereas the oppressor, having no need to do so, does not 'inhabit the emotional location or the physical reality of the oppressed' (Moran, 2008, p. 27). The oppressed are included in the dominant group's reality only to the extent to which they serve the dominant group's needs. Nielsen (1990) describes how it is to an oppressed woman's advantage to be 'attuned and attentive' to the male perspective as

well as her own in order to survive socially and physically. This means learning and accommodating herself to how 'men view the world' and being able to 'read, predict, and understand the interests, motivations, expectations and attitudes of men' (Nielsen, 1990, p. 10).

Similarly, black feminist writer, bell hooks (2004), describes the need, when black, to understand two realities, the workings of both black and white culture in order to survive. A similar necessity for double consciousness can be argued for women subjected to domestic violence by their intimate male partners. It will be to the woman's advantage to have a heightened awareness of her partner's perspective. However, her partner does not need to reciprocate.

Feminist standpoint theory has particular merit as a research paradigm for women's experience of the mechanism of domination in domestic violence. However, research using standpoint theory in domestic violence has generated fierce opposition, particularly if the voices of women are held to be unitary, more honest than but victimised by the male standpoint. A typical critique is provided by Trinder (2000). She reviewed a study by Hester and Radford (1996) that used standpoint research to explore contact between non-residential fathers and their children in the aftermath of domestic violence. The study was based on the experiences of women and children and no men were interviewed. Trinder wrote:

The unitariness of the account, the lack of any contrary evidence to men's utter complicity and women's utter innocence makes one wonder about the extent to which the voices of the women interviewees are presented in all their complexity or whether they have been (even unconsciously) filtered by a feminist understanding of domestic violence (Trinder, 2000, p. 48).

Trinder disliked the fact that Hester and Radford's research presented gender identities as 'unitary, discrete and oppositional.' For example, she argued that the women were presented as passive victims of abusive men but fiercely protecting their children (Trinder, 2000, p. 48).

If domestic violence has as its core a power differential and results in oppression it can be argued that previous research on domestic violence underpinned by feminist standpoint theory is not biased but provides a clear picture of the commonality of issues for women. This can be misinterpreted as the presentation of unitary, discrete and oppositional gender identities, particularly when the research focuses on female victims of male oppression. However, this can be countered by the argument that the dynamics of domination and subordination extend beyond gender identities as such to gender experience.

The strength and purpose of standpoint research is not to portray women as the victims of abusive men, ‘always done to rather than doing ...’ (Trinder, 2000, p. 48). It is to uncover the mechanics of oppression by which domination may be established and maintained in the face of any resistance by the women. The information can be used to challenge and rectify the social collusion with oppression of a particular group.

To have interviewed the male partners of the women in this study, given they had used abuse and violence against the women, would not necessarily have provided a more balanced view of the situation. The feminist research of Anderson and Jack (1991) is a case in point. They conducted oral histories with men who were court mandated to attend a treatment program for abusing their female partners or wives. Although not referring specifically to double consciousness, there are features of Anderson’s reflections on the lessons learnt within the research that raise the crucial implications of this concept for research on the experience of any type of oppression such as domestic violence. The men they interviewed were neither cognisant of their effect on, nor empathic towards, the women they had physically assaulted:

These batterers did not recognise the power granted to them by their maleness – they perceived themselves as powerless, as controlled by the women in their lives, as victims of a biased criminal justice system. This subjective sense of powerlessness blinded them, in many cases, to the power they abused when they lashed out against the women in their lives. It was only through a feminist lens – a lens that made the relationship between gender and violence problematic – that their privileged position became visible (Anderson, cited in Leavy, 2007, pp. 166-167).

The same difficulty was reported by Harne (2005) in her qualitative study of fathers who were participating in perpetrator programmes because of their history of violence. Harne focused on their relationships with their children, either when still living with their families or when they had contact with children in the post-separation context. Harne noted that to take the men's accounts at face value would have given the impression that 'nothing much happened to these women and children and that their violence was merely a response to the women's violence or their children's unreasonable behaviour' (Harne, 2005, p. 183). The fathers felt that they were at least the equal if not the main victim of conflict and dysfunction within the family. Harne argues that '... such interpretations would, however, deny the material reality of men's violence and abuse and the material harm it does and the control it exerts over women and children's lives' (Harne, 2005, pp. 183-184).

This research argues that those who are more powerful in a particular context are not always aware of their material or emotional impact on those less powerful – similar to the concept of double consciousness. Whether this means that research into the less powerful allows a less distorted view of social reality has been heavily debated.

Epistemological privilege

Earlier researchers, using feminist standpoint theory, felt that women's subordinate status in society created both the need and the capacity for double consciousness, and facilitated an 'epistemological privilege' (Narayan, 2004) for those who were socially marginalised. From this perspective, research into women's lives provides a more accurate and dependable appraisal of social reality (Jaggar, 1997) and 'uncovers the necessary ingredients for social change' (Brooks, 2007, p. 69).

This argument has been challenged on two accounts: firstly, that the perspectives of one group can never be said to be more real or accurate than another's (Nielson, 1990) and secondly that the diversity of experience prohibits reducing all women to a particular group sharing one experience and a single standpoint based on that experience (Trinder, 2000).

However, the contributions to and value of knowledge for social work practice from researching the experience of those being oppressed by a certain phenomenon (in this case domestic violence) remain viable when such potential shortcomings of a feminist standpoint approach are addressed. Indeed, Harding (1987, pp. 188–189) suggests that such a postmodern critique of a unitary feminist perspective can be countered by the assertion of bell hooks that: ‘feminism names the fact that women can federate around their common resistance to all the different forms of male domination’.

In rejecting objectivism, feminist standpoint scholars have debated how not to minimise women’s differences in the drive to contribute to an organised force for social change. The challenge faced is that if women ‘occupy many different standpoints and inhabit many different realities’ (Hekman, 2004, p. 227), does it bring about an apolitical relativity? As discussed by Nielsen (1990, p. 27), ‘One could argue that there is no need to determine one view as more correct, that plurality of views could prevail. But at some point — such as when important decisions have to be made — some view of social reality must be endorsed’. Nielson (1990, p. 29) uses the phrase ‘a fusion of horizons’ as the possible outcome of communication between a diversity of standpoints.

A focus away from the argument for a connection between any form of social marginalisation and epistemic privilege is suggested by Janack (1997). She prefers a process of ‘making a case for the inclusion of members of marginalised groups in theory making’ (Janack, 1997, p. 125). She also advocates focusing on Harding’s suggestion that ‘those who will bear the consequences of a decision should have a proportionate share in making that decision’ (Janack, 1997, p. 137).

The logic of extending the epistemological privilege of women’s standpoint to all oppressed and disadvantaged populations was also pointed out by Swigonsky (1994). She draws parallels to the analysis by bell hooks (1984; 1989) who proposes that the different forms of oppression are interlocking rather than hierarchical. Attention to the interlocking nature of oppression by black feminist writers, such as hooks, shifts the ‘entire locus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race or

gender or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among these systems' (Collins, 1990, p.110).

In addition to a feminist standpoint, this research is informed by structural social work theory (Mullaly, 1997; 2002). This approach focuses on oppression as an explanation for social problems and 'an anti-oppressive social work practice as the means for dealing with these problems' (Mullaly, 2002: x). Whereas structural social work has a 'focus on addressing material issues primarily through politicisation and collectivisation of social problems' (Pease, 2003), Mullaly's (2002) view on anti-oppressive social work practice is informed by postmodernism, poststructuralism, cultural studies and postcolonialism. His framework of oppression/anti-oppression is therefore based on two bodies of social thought (modernist and postmodernist).

Such a blend of structural social work theory and anti-oppressive social work practice informs this study's methodology. It is congruent with feminist theory in its approach to the 'reality' of the problem and the focus on social structures and social policies but also addresses 'postmodernist concerns for diversity, difference and cultural relativity' (Mullaly, 2002, p. x).

Whereas the relativism of postmodernist theorising can appear incompatible with 'the conception of a material reality when considering gender relations' (Scourfield, 2001, p. 66) this research acknowledges that one can be at once an oppressor and oppressed. Individuals belong to multiple and overlapping social groups (Jaggar, 2008, p. 306) and an 'inferior citizenship' can be imposed in a variety of ways and at a personal, cultural and structural level by the different forms, sources, levels of severity and experiences associated with oppression (Mullaly, 2002, p. 50). Mullaly builds on Foucault's suggestion of going beyond viewing oppression as a conscious and intentional act of one group against another. Despite acts of intentional oppression, Mullaly stated that much of it is systemic and unintentional 'because it is built into our social institutions and carried out unconsciously in our day to day lives' (Mullaly, 2002, p. 41).

Feminist standpoint research on women's experience of domestic violence does not have to conflate the diversity of their experiences to one unified standpoint. However, acknowledging diversity and relativity does not preclude the relevance and possibility of a 'common set of dynamics' between dominant and subordinate groups (Mullaly, 2002, p. 50). Using standpoint theory on the topic of domestic violence can also be an 'innovative approach to knowledge building' (Brooks, 2007, p. 77) on oppression.

The methodological gap identified in the literature and research relevant to this study was a lack of studies providing in-depth holistic accounts of women's experiences and perceptions of domestic violence. Thus a qualitative approach was undertaken for this study.

A qualitative approach

The capacity of the qualitative research paradigm to seek 'rich descriptions of individual experiences' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.16) complemented the aims and purpose of this study. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (2000, p. 11) describe qualitative methods as allowing access to motives, meanings, actions and reactions of people in the context of their daily lives 'without relying on predetermined and fixed applications of the predictive and prescriptive requirements of quantitative methodologies' which feminist standpoint seeks to avoid. Qualitative research does not seek to generalise, so rather than use surveys, opinion polls or structured interviews using closed questions, semi-structured or unstructured interviews are used for in-depth interviewing that is directed towards understanding participants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words' (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77). Sample size is therefore less important, as the emphasis is on depth of understanding.

In contrast to quantitative research, which can be more concerned with measurement, prediction and generalising (Grbich, 2000), qualitative research facilitates the examination of the meanings women generate from their experiences of abuse and violence within their relationships, and pays attention to their own interpretation of their situation. A strong argument has been made by Herdman (2004, p. 98) that the

‘uncountable or unmeasurable’ issues associated with ‘suffering, insight, misery, anguish and emotion’ cannot be adequately captured by quantitative research methods. Given this research focuses on women’s experiences of abuse and violence, qualitative research methods were more appropriate and reduced the risk of the women’s lived experience of abuse and violence being marginalised by a quantitative approach.

Feminist researchers can usefully draw from a wide array of methods and methodologies. The value of quantitative research to feminist researchers does not need to be overlooked when one considers the provision of statistical data that is generalisable about the experiences of women and can ‘guide policy and practice across organisations and inform governmental decisions’ (Griffiths & Hanmer, 2005, pp. 38-39). O’Neill (1995, p. 343), for example, points out the capacity of quantitative research for showing the patterns and influences of multiple factors in shaping attitudes in society, whereas qualitative research has been criticised for lacking rigor, being atheoretical, methodologically weak, methodologically led, anecdotal, mystifying and failing to produce findings that are useful (Shaw & Gould, 2001, p. 5).

The origin of a feminist distrust towards the use of statistics and numbers typical of quantitative research is suggested by Brayton (1997) as the devaluing or trivialising of women’s experiences. However, Brayton considered that sexist and elitist values were reflective of the larger social milieu rather than simply inherent to quantitative research. Similarly, Griffiths and Hanmer (2005) argue that what gives research its feminist perspective is how studies are conceptualised and their findings presented and used.

Quantitative or qualitative research both have the potential to fragment and misrepresent women’s experiences of domestic violence if patriarchal values underpin the research process. This is particularly the case when there is a reliance on listening for and matching women’s accounts of their lives to standard descriptions of abuse currently understood to constitute domestic violence. To this end, it was also

important to look closely at the model of qualitative research appropriate for this research.

Phenomenology

This study is underpinned by the principles of phenomenology, in particular ‘the belief that phenomena should be studied without preconceived notion’ (Hatch, 2002, p. 29). From this perspective, research ‘is a process of learning and constructing the meaning of human experience through intensive dialogue with persons who are living the experience’ (Beanland, Schneider, LoBiodo-Wood & Haber, 1999, p. 245). Patton (1990, p. 69) proposes that phenomenology asks, ‘What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?’ Such an approach uses in-depth interviewing about lived experience to facilitate a mapping of the general area and the emergence of any patterns from the data (Alston & Bowles, 1998).

This study aims to address the exclusion and fragmentation of women’s experiences within the research literature. Where quantitative or qualitative research has contributed to the fragmentation of domestic violence into discrete forms of abuse, such abuse has then been reduced to chargeable or non-chargeable offences. This is compounded when the data is interpreted in light of the dominant language and meanings and results in parts of the women’s lives being neglected and ‘disappearing’ (DeVault, 1990, p. 101). This study takes steps to counter this tendency within the literature and thus to challenge the socio-legal response to domestic violence.

A phenomenological qualitative feminist standpoint research project lends itself well to social work values, knowledge and skills (Shaw & Gould, 2001, p. 15) and offers an effective way of avoiding a compartmentalisation of women’s experience of domestic violence and a serious compromise to the understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence as a whole. Studying the phenomenon without preconceived notions means avoiding the temptation to simply match women’s descriptions of their experiences to previous definitions or categories of abuse. It also allows the experiences of women who could not have their experiences of domestic violence

legally substantiated to be incorporated. It includes the voices of those women whose experience either did not culminate in particular incidences or episodes of violence recognised by the legal system, or could not provide the evidentiary requirements to charge.

While this research aims to use feminism as one of its grounding theories, there are many internal and external forces exacerbating the feminist researchers' attempts to minimise the power differential and to do no harm within the research process. This is particularly challenging when considering the constellation of issues raised by research in domestic violence. Issues of ethical responsibilities to the participants in the form of confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, autonomy and emotional and physical safety can create ethical dilemmas. The ability to self-reflect in such an emotive and contentious research process affects the transparency of the presence of the researcher as an 'instrument of the research' (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 43) and the influence that personal investment (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002, p. 252) has on the shaping of the research process (Fook, 1999). Ultimately, the level of procedural rigor affects the credibility and trustworthiness of the final research account. Issues of reflexivity and trustworthiness are addressed within the following sections on the sampling framework, data generation methods, ethical considerations and data analysis.

Sampling Framework

This section outlines the process of recruiting participants for this project. It includes a brief overview of the sampling method and size, followed by a discussion of the sampling criteria and a detailed description of the recruitment process.

Sampling method

Qualitative research is concerned with collecting specific cases, events or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding (Neuman, 2004, p. 137) and to 'capture depth and richness rather than representativeness' (Padgett, 1998, p. 50). I initially decided to utilise a non- probability purposive sampling method in order to seek out

‘information rich cases’ (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 46), with the intention of also using snowball sampling techniques. Snowballing relies on chains of referral and can be used to increase the diversity of the sample, particularly in hard-to-reach groups or women who fear exposure because of possible threats to security (Penrod, Preston, Caine & Starks, 2003).

Sampling size

The aim was to locate mothers who currently have or have had children in post-separation shared parenting arrangements in the aftermath of domestic violence. Patton’s (2005) recent feminist standpoint research on domestic violence had a sample size of 53 women. However, Patton felt she achieved saturation after approximately 30 interviews. In this study, saturation could be said to be achieved after 20 interviews, in that I was able to see the same patterns repeatedly emerging in the data and had gained a measure of appreciation of the women’s stories. A further 10 interviews were conducted to further observe an emerging similarity in the pattern of abuse between women who had or had not experienced physical violence. Limiting the interviews to 30 women achieved a balance between meeting the aims and purpose of the study, the aims of feminist standpoint research, and the time constraints of the researcher.

Sampling criteria

Participants were included in this study if they were women who:

- Are mothers with children currently or previously in their care. That is, the mother has/had primary residence and now shares the parenting with the father;
- Have an ex-partner who has/had court ordered or privately arranged contact. This included supervised or unsupervised contact arrangements of any frequency or duration (for example, daytime only, overnights, weekends, holiday stays, weekly, and so on);
- Self-identified as having been in an abusive relationship, whether or not this included physical violence;

- Have been separated for at least two years prior to the interview; and
- Currently reside in Tasmania.

A greater emphasis was placed on the overlap between a broader conceptualisation of domestic violence and shared parenting arrangements in general. Therefore, I did not set criteria for the particular type of shared parenting arrangement. In my experience as a counsellor, the forms of shared parenting arrangements can change very quickly between parents.

The criterion for abuse and violence posed a significant issue. As pointed out in Chapter One, at what point is a pattern of abuse identified as domestic violence if it does not include physical violence? Like Power (1998), Kirkwood (1993) and Kelly (1988), I wanted to avoid silencing women by using a particular definition of abuse, violence or domestic violence. My aim was to investigate the links between domestic violence, other than the experience of physical violence, and the experience of post-separation shared parenting. I therefore wanted to include the experiences of women who did not experience physical violence or sexual violence in their relationship, yet still considered themselves as having been in an abusive relationship. As noted by Power (1998), ‘...constructions of what constitutes an abusive relationship change ... applying the language of domestic violence to a relationship is a particular strategy that not all women choose’ (Power, 1998, p. 44). This can be the case despite their experience of physical violence. The women in this study thus self-identified. If they were not sure, I used the broader definitions of domestic violence outlined in Chapter One.

I decided that the women should be separated for two years for several reasons. First, I wanted to avoid interviewing women who were in the initial period of crisis typical of separation. As with Power (1998), this was an ethical decision. Second, it encouraged women whose arrangements for contact between the father and the children would be established to some degree. Third, it avoided a focus on a discrete stage of separation in the aftermath of domestic violence, such as two to five years,

and encouraged an understanding of the waxing and waning of issues over the lifespan of a woman's post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

I did not specify in the criteria the minimum length of living together in relationship prior to separation. This did not pose a problem until later in the research when one woman explained her relationship had been less than a year in duration and had ended soon after an unexpected pregnancy. Another woman had not had a period of living and parenting children together with her partner before separation. However, their pre-separation and post-separation experiences contributed greatly to my ability to see the patterns emerging from the data so I decided to include them in this study and have made reference to their situations in the data chapters.

Sampling recruitment

I initially expected to promote this study using strategies similar to previous Australian researchers studying domestic violence (KPMG, 1994; Keys Young, 1998; Patton, 2005) who had proven successful in both the recruitment and protection of women who had experienced abusive relationships.

Three strategies were planned:

1. Arranging a meeting with the practitioner staff of Yemaya (North) and She (South). These agencies provide medium to long term support for women who are in or have left abusive relationships. The meetings were designed to provide information about this research and to allow for questions and clarification. Permission was requested by the researcher for these agency phone numbers to be included on fliers and the information sheet so that women could:
 - (a) Ring to clarify the authenticity of the research;
 - (b) Leave their name and contact number on the agency answering machine and have their details forwarded on to me;
 - (c) Speak to a worker to tell them they would like to participate and have their details forwarded to me; and

- (d) Request debriefing after their interview if necessary.
2. Networking was to begin by contacting relevant government agencies and non-government service providers via letter. Follow-up visits were planned in order to distribute information about the research and provide fliers that might be distributed to women who could be interested in participating.
3. A media release was to be developed through the University of Tasmania's Media Office, as Patton (2005, p. 102) found that this (and the subsequent newspaper articles and interviews) was the most successful strategy, recruiting 34 of the 53 participants in her study.

Although a face-to-face meeting with Yemaya and a telephone meeting with She were held, I found the second and third strategies were unnecessary because, over time, women came forward of their own accord. This initially occurred after presenting my research ideas at two small conferences at the University of Tasmania where I disseminated pamphlets (Appendix A) advertising my research to counsellors and social workers who attended the conferences. Five women sought me out afterwards to talk about participating and five women responded to pamphlets given to them by counsellors at the conferences.

As well, I inadvertently found that having conversations with women I didn't know, such as in the supermarket or on an aeroplane, led to an exchange of information about their relationship status and my research. Women often showed enthusiasm to be part of the research. As word spread about this study, women approached me to be interviewed and then recommended the research project to other women whom they knew were in similar post-separation shared parenting situations. This allowed access to those 'hard to reach groups' described by Power (1998, p. 44) in her feminist poststructural analysis of women's narrative of domestic violence. Women who would not ordinarily respond to pamphlets, attend an agency or seek professional intervention did respond to suggestions by their friends or acquaintances to participate in the study. Many of these women would have been too concerned with

safety issues or too uncertain about the nature of the abuse they had experienced to respond to research invitations.

The process of snowballing was so successful that 30 women were interviewed with very little 'formal' promotion of the project. The strength of this sample was increased using this method. Participants were from diverse socio economic backgrounds and with a wide range of experiences. Their experiences also contribute to an understanding of the links between abusive relationships and post-separation shared parenting issues.

Making contact

After the initial contact by potential participants, an information package about the research was sent to those women who were still interested. This comprised an introductory letter, (Appendix B) an information sheet (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix D). Once the participants had received the package they were invited to contact me directly by email or telephone to organise a time and setting for an interview, or simply to discuss the interview process. They were also invited to contact Yemaya or She, although I am not aware of any women taking up this offer.

The initial contact from potential participants was particularly important in order to establish a connection with the women (Patton, 2005), given the sensitivity of this research topic. I was guided by Patton's (2005) approach in her research on women and domestic violence.

This entailed:

- Providing clear, concise information on the research and on myself via the information sheet and consent form;
- Skilfully establishing rapport around the sensitivity of the topic;
- Responding appropriately to their concerns regarding my trustworthiness, including my knowledge of domestic violence; and

- Detailing the importance of their participation in benefiting other women and effecting change (Patton, 2005, pp. 103–104).

I also negotiated methods and locations for contact with each participant to maximise safety and anonymity.

Only one of the women initially agreed to be interviewed but then declined. She decided it would be too upsetting. Three women asked to participate without a face-to-face interview. One of these women initially offered a face-to-face interview and then realised she would prefer a telephone interview, given the strength of her emotions after 30 years. The other two women requested that they write their stories for the same reason. These were clear indications of the emotional impact on the women of their experiences, which I took into consideration in the collection of the data.

Data Generation Methods

In the following section I present the process used to generate data. It includes descriptions of the interview schedule, the process of data collection and the pilot study, as well as a discussion of the tensions between facilitating the research process and considering the participants' needs. These tensions were a significant issue in this research and involved a number of issues about process and a blurring of roles for the researcher. Each of these tensions including the source of data, the interview length, use of the schedule, self-disclosure, reading the transcripts and the roles of counsellor, educator and debriefer are also addressed in this section.

The interview schedule

I initially chose a semi-structured interview schedule for the data collection process for its ability to elicit comparable responses to a series of open-ended questions (Alston & Bowles, 1998, p. 65). This approach also allows the probing and exploration of unanticipated responses (Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p. 390) and enables

the discussion of related issues (Alston & Bowles, 1998, p. 118). Graham (1984) states that ‘the use of semi-structured interviews has become the principle means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives’ (Graham, 1984, p.112).

The interview schedule (see Appendix E) initially comprised three main areas of inquiry:

1. The pre-separation relationship;
2. The post-separation relationship; and
3. What was helpful/unhelpful

The data collection process

Face-to-face interviews were conducted wherever was most comfortable for the participant. This was usually in their homes, which involved travelling anywhere within Tasmania. For some women it was safer to meet in a neutral space. These interviews required more careful planning, particularly if they involved travel and the woman had any concerns for her safety. However, once the interview began the setting became irrelevant, providing the practical needs for food, water, tea, coffee, tissues and a bathroom were met. Most of the women had never had the opportunity to tell the whole story of their relationship with the father of their children. The interviews were audiotaped for later transcription. They were then bound and a copy given to the participant to check for accuracy and adequate removal of identifying details.

Learning from the pilot study

The first two interviews were conducted as a pilot study. These were arranged with two women who were eligible to participate in the research. One woman had not experienced physical violence and was no longer involved in post-separation shared parenting because her children had reached adulthood. The other woman had experienced physical violence and was currently sharing parenting with her ex-partner.

The research design and methods were evaluated using the six reference points detailed by Stanford (1999, p. 71) in the analysis of her pilot interviews:

1. The relevance, flow and adequacy of the interview schedule;
2. The effectiveness of the questioning techniques;
3. The adequacy of interpersonal and interviewing skills to achieve rapport;
4. The relevance and quality of the data gathered;
5. The method and effectiveness of recording data; and
6. The 'legitimacy' of the research question.

This process highlighted a number of important issues that impacted on the data collection process. As a feminist researcher, I became aware of blurred boundaries and 'tensions' in the interview process which demanded careful consideration and refinement throughout the remaining interviews. These issues are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Sources of data

During the pilot study I became aware that I received important data from each stage of the recruitment and interview process. This data created an appreciation of the women's lives that was not necessarily transmitted in the interview alone. For example, I found that both women in the pilot study and every participant thereafter provided rich data in the first phone call or meeting prior to the interview. This is also noted by other Australian feminist researchers such as Patton (2005) and Power (1998). Power makes the comment that she tried to keep the research process clean but adds that 'once I had invited women to contact me for the specific purpose of telling their story about violence in their lives, the story telling began' (Power, 1998, p. 50).

As a result, I learnt to keep a pen and pad on hand from the first point of contact with a potential participant because of the wealth of information I would be given when I least expected it. I regularly felt I had turned on the tape recorder too late because

really vital points were made by the women before I had even sat down with them to begin the interview. The story telling would continue after the interview was concluded and the tape recorder turned off, and in subsequent phone calls. The participants also frequently provided letters, court reports or documents concerning judicial processes to corroborate their story. I would sometimes be updated by participants in serendipitous meetings after their interviews.

I wondered, as does Power (1998), what data I could ethically include in the research. I resolved this by asking specific consent from each woman to include telephone calls, and any information I received before or after the audiotape was recording.

Length of the interview

In my research design, I anticipated that each interview would take between one and two hours but found in the pilot study that each interview lasted between three and four hours. I was concerned about this length and the effect this might have on the women. At first I wondered whether I could be more 'efficient' in the collection of the data. I tried targeting specific questions to reduce the length of time, but to no avail. I found that the emotional content of the women's stories precluded a concise, well-ordered interview and all of the interviews were between three to four hours.

My concerns about the effect on the women were allayed. My observations matched those of Power (1998) and I found that all the women were grateful to be able to relate the story of their relationships and the post-separation consequences. They appeared to need the time to feel complete and to leave nothing unexpressed. As a result, I learned to warn all the women of the possible length of time the interview would take and invited them to schedule it wisely into their week. I learned to trust the process, and the benefit to the women and the research, of having the time to fully tell their story.

The use of the schedule

I sensed a need in the pilot interviews to relieve the women from trying to live up to expectations for a well-ordered and coherent account of their experiences. Like Power

(1998) I found the women sometimes expressed worry about not being methodical. As described by Thomas (2009, p. 120): ‘People do not tell stories and narrate their lives in a linear fashion – in neat, tidy sequences; they move back and forth, revisiting, reframing, adding and altering. This is part of the sense making process’. I learned to clearly explain to every participant that I would ask the first question but although I had an interview schedule handy, the story was theirs for the telling and they did not need to be linear or methodical about it. This set the scene well and the women became more relaxed despite such an emotive and potentially overwhelming topic.

It also became clear that once I asked the first question, the areas of inquiry in my interview guide were invariably covered. Like Karp, the ‘artfulness’ of the interview was not so much in my interview guide but in also knowing how and ‘when to follow up on what a person is saying in the moment’ (Karp, cited in Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 122).

As a result, I found myself conducting more in-depth than semi-structured interviews. The women simply described their experiences and perceptions from when they first met their partners, and elaborated on the complex nature of the relationship and their post-separation experiences.

I also became adept at picking up on and responding to ‘markers’ (Weiss, 1994, p. 77). These are valuable sources of information that participants may offer in the interview whilst discussing something unrelated. If responded to, they show the interviewer’s focus and interest as well as providing rich data that may easily have been overlooked. I found the most common markers were expressions of feelings, descriptions, evaluations, throw-away remarks, gestures and body language and often occurred within the less articulated and understood aspects of the abuse they had experienced. I paid these close attention.

The use of self-disclosure

Mainstream interview norms encourage deflection of participants' questions about the interviewer's life (Lather, 1991, p. 61). Yet Johnson (2002, p. 190) speaks of self-disclosure as a way of encouraging mutual reciprocity and trust between researcher and participants and Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007) similarly argue that self-disclosure effectively addresses any inequitable power relations.

I was prepared to self-disclose my own experiences of abuse within relationships to the extent that it seemed relevant and useful to the women I was interviewing. However, I was not convinced in the pilot study that this was as important to the women as conveying my ability to contain and, most importantly, respond to their story of trauma. I therefore decided to refrain from self-disclosure. The women knew I counselled in the area of domestic violence and I may have indicated an experiential understanding of abuse, but interestingly none of the women were keen to know more. I believe the potential power differential was reduced by the way I contained and responded to the women's story of trauma and allowed them as much time as they needed to feel complete. Openly defining the logistical and emotional boundaries of this study with each participant also avoided a power differential that was at the participants' expense.

Reading the transcript

From the pilot interviews, it became apparent that it was necessary to have a preparatory conversation with the women forewarning and forearming them against the pitfalls of gauging their sense of themselves and the interview from the written word. I became more adept throughout the study at explaining to the women how a transcript can belie the conversational depth of the interview itself and the connection developed between the researcher and participant.

Most of the women kept a copy of the transcript for their own records but for seven of them reading the transcript was too much of a burden. They did not want to immerse themselves again in the pain of their lives or risk the transcript getting into the wrong hands, such as children or an ex-partner. A further five women agreed to check their

transcripts but refused to keep a copy in their possession for the same reasons. This was a complex decision for many of the women, as they recognised their participation in the research and the resulting transcript was an important record of the wisdom they had gained through immense adversity.

The limited role of the researcher

The interview process itself was only part of an intense data collection process in which I felt the ethical tension of ‘the extent to which we as researchers insert ourselves into the life of another for the purpose of generating data’ (Power, 1998, p. 117). I wondered how, why and at what stage to conclude such a relationship between researcher and participant, or at least to extricate myself from their lives. I became disquieted by the notion that there needs to be greater consideration given to finalising the sort of multi-layered relationship and intimacy that can develop in such a data collection process. This is particularly where there is an extensive sharing of pain and trauma. Both Patton (2005) and Power (1998) describe similar issues in their interviews on domestic violence.

The role of counsellor

I was first alerted in the pilot study that it was difficult not to blur the role of interviewer and counsellor. I felt an ethical responsibility to leave the women in a better space for the telling of their story using the knowledge I had gained as a counsellor working with women who had experienced domestic violence. I considered it vital for every interview thereafter to counter any focus on self-blame or a negative story of self with judicious counselling techniques from the strengths perspective and narrative therapy. For example, if the main story of self was negative, I used narrative questions to invite the woman to develop an alternative, more empowering story. All of the women were clearly unaware of the extent to which they resisted their partner’s domination and were more focused on wondering how and why they let it happen. I do not feel such a conscious blurring of roles compromised my role as a researcher so much as being a necessary skill for a feminist researcher around the subject of abuse. I took heart from Karp’s comments that his participants thanked him for the chance to tell their story and to have a

sociologist ask them questions, as this gave them a perspective on their lives that was different to what they could have got through years of therapy (Karp, in Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 138).

The role of educator

Within the pilot study, it became apparent to me that the definition of abuse played a complex role in women's stories. All the women had particularly chequered notions about what may constitute abuse other than the more traditional constructs of physical and sexual abuse. They often struggled to articulate their experiences because of this. In the descriptions of their lives with their partners the women made regular unwitting references to aspects of abuse within their social and economic arrangements, communication patterns, physical and sexual relationships, and how they were publically portrayed by their partners. Whereas this drew my attention to the similarity to traditional definitions of social, economic, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, I realised there was a constant tension between equating what the women were saying with (or educating them on) such established and defined forms of abuse. In the face of their intense despair and distress, I was acutely aware of the benefits to them of 'allowing' a process of co-creation of meaning. Ethically, I felt bound to inform the women about how their experiences matched current definitions of abuse. The timing of this educative process was more difficult for me to navigate.

As I reflected on this tension, I became aware that this constant tension between 'raising awareness' of abuse, countering self-blame and exploring perceptions did not so much compromise my role as a researcher as force me to listen more deeply for less chartered territory. I found this became as valuable as targeting specific questions and I adopted a more recursive questioning style. As stated by DeVault (1990), the feminist interview is used to illuminate the experiences of oppression. This means uncovering women's knowledge and skills that have been concealed and undervalued. It also means countering research that is less interested in 'incompletely articulated aspects of women's experiences' (DeVault, 1990, p. 100).

The role of debriefer

The need to debrief the participants after the interview and then again after they read their manuscripts was the final point emerging from the pilot study. As a result of the connection that I established with each participant, it became clear to me that I should be the one to provide the debriefing after the interview. It did not seem appropriate to provide the names of agencies which could provide a debriefing service that would involve a retelling of the story. Instead I asked whether the women preferred me to ring or whether they preferred to ring me in the days following the interview. Most of the women preferred to ring me and did so. It was common for the participants to feel as if the interview had been a turning point for them in that they recognised the importance and validity of their difficulties both pre- and post-separation. Any doubt I had regarding the ethical responsibility for me to maintain an interviewing style that included counselling and educating roles was ameliorated by the positive comments from the women.

I also discovered in the pilot interviews that it was vital to debrief the women after reading their transcripts, as this process often evoked very strong reactions. Power (1998, p. 54) spoke of a short second interview with her participants after they had read their transcripts where she asked them what it was like to receive and read their story and how they felt about their decision to participate in the research. Like Power's participants, the women in my study said that it was the first time they had ever been invited to tell the whole story, and that it was very useful for them to have done so.

However, many of the women felt extremely self-conscious and ashamed at the way they expressed themselves. Power (1998) also noted the serious concerns the women in her research had about their level of articulateness. In effect, the level of abuse the women had sustained in their relationships had the potential to become part of the research process.

Although this process took considerable refining, I believe I had a duty of care to debrief the women in a way which was empowering. It was crucial to normalise their

reactions to the written word and I debriefed the women using the strengths perspective and narrative counselling techniques. I pointed out the openness and honesty of their interviews and shared my responses to them as an interviewer and also as a woman. This called for a level of intimacy that I had not anticipated but was essential to the women's equilibrium or sense of themselves after sharing so deeply and for so long. There was a further duty of care as a feminist researcher to avoid minimising or trivialising their concerns by acknowledging the emotional cost to the participant rather than give greater credence to my time constraints and interest in the success of the research.

This section describes the development of the data collection process before and after the pilot study. Given the traumatic nature of the topic it was essential that the data collection process was ethical in every aspect and that the needs of those women who agreed to share the intimate details of their lives took precedent in the research design.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted with the approval of the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee (University of Tasmania). The ethical requirements for social work researchers are to ensure that:

- Participation is both voluntary and informed;
- There is provision of confidentiality and anonymity; and
- There is a commitment to the research principle of non-maleficence or 'Doing no harm' to participants (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p. 21).

This section outlines the procedures undertaken to address these issues, with particular focus on maintaining the physical and emotional safety of both the participants and the researcher when interviewing in the area of domestic violence.

Informed consent

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. Each woman self-selected after reading one of the pamphlets that invited participation in the study or talking with someone who had been interviewed already. Further information was provided when potential participants contacted me. If they met the sampling criteria and decided to participate, an information package comprising an introductory letter, information sheet, and two copies of a consent form was sent. The information package also included details outlining the right of participants to withdraw at any time over the duration of the research without any duress, which was also reiterated at the beginning and end of the interview.

The participant was requested to bring both copies of the consent form to the interview so that they could be signed. One copy was filed in a secure location and the other was returned to the participant.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are influencing factors in a person's decision to participate in research, particularly research of a sensitive nature (Patton, 2005). Given the small regional nature of communities in Tasmania, there is an increased risk of participants being identified by individuals or audiences privy to the findings after completion of the thesis. To complicate the issue of interviewing in a small state was my acquaintance with the ex-partners of three of the participants. Details of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were outlined in the information sheet and again at the beginning of the interview.

Confidentiality and anonymity were achieved using the following strategies:

- Only the researcher, chief investigator and supervisors and two transcribers had access to the raw data collected;
- All identifying information (for example consent forms) was kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at the University of Tasmania, separate from interview transcripts;

- Demographic data was de-identified and kept separately from transcripts. Such data was only presented in aggregated form to prevent links being made to individual women;
- Pseudonyms were provided or chosen by the participants;
- Interviews were transcribed, in the main, by the researcher in a private location on the Launceston Campus of the University;
- The participants were informed of the possible employment of a transcriber;
- The researcher was provided with a confidentiality agreement from the employed transcriber;
- Identifying information was deleted from the transcripts;
- Participants were invited to read their interviews once transcribed in order to edit and verify it, or omit further data that they felt would be identifiable;
- Identifying information was deleted from the reporting and analysis of findings;
- In the presentation of findings, whether in the thesis or at a conference, no individual accounts were used but a list of core themes selected, with the richest being reported;
- Examples or quotes used in the presentation of the findings or for an article or conference paper were short and had all identifiable information such as events, names, people and places removed;
- Participants were provided with the contact details for both the chief investigator and for the ethics committee on the information sheet. This provided the participants with a point of contact if there were: concerns or points they wished to clarify before the interview process began; concerns for the way in which the research was conducted; or concerns for my actions as a researcher;
- Extensive legal advice was sought regarding my legal/ethical responsibilities for reporting battering or child abuse disclosed in research interviews in Tasmania. Whereas at the time there was apparently no legal mandate for me to do so, I also had an ethical responsibility as a social worker. On one occasion I decided to

report the treatment of a child by one of the women's ex-partners to Child Protection; and

- Legal advice was obtained from the University Legal Office regarding the risk to the data for subpoena in Tasmania.

Safety protocol

This section addresses the procedures undertaken to protect the participants and researcher from physical or emotional harm arising from any part of the research process. The safety of the women and the researcher needs to be addressed in order for research in this field to meet the ethical requirement of non-malificence.

Protecting participants from physical harm

Workers within the domestic violence field are familiar with the safeguards required to protect workers and female clients from retaliatory violence from male partners or ex-partners. However, the potential for creating a dangerous research environment for both participant and researcher is less well known (Langford, 2000; Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2005). Langford (2000, p. 138) believes that because of the need to talk about their abuse, some women may not adequately assess their own risk or consider the safety of other participants or the investigator when agreeing to participate in a research study. Patton (2005, p. 110) and Power (1998, p. 54) both refer to the safety issues that became apparent on two occasions when interviewing women in their own home.

Even though the participants in this research were mothers who had been separated for at least two years, it was possible that their ex-partners could still pose a risk to their safety with interfering or stalking behaviours. Therefore a framework developed by Langford (2000) was used to guide the assessment of physical safety for this study. This framework included the following questions:

1. What are the safety risks to participants in this study?
2. How can the researcher safely initiate contact with women to arrange interview times without being detected by an abusive partner or violating confidentiality?

3. What are the safety risks to the investigator and participants in a group interview if one of the participants was followed?
4. What is the investigator's legal and ethical responsibility for reporting cases of women battering or child abuse that are disclosed in interviews?
5. What precautions need to be taken to protect the participant's identity or protect the data from subpoena? (Langford, 2000, p. 134).

Guided by these questions, I made every effort to obtain sufficient information from participants prior to carrying out interviews about the possible danger from an ex-partner. This was particularly the case if the interview was to take place in the participant's home. I discussed with participants any possible risks to their safety or the safety of the researcher if their ex-partner were to discover they had participated in a study on their experiences of post- separation life and parenting in the aftermath of domestic violence. I believed this was necessary even after long periods of separation. Patton also comments on this, finding that safety issues were a concern despite the women having been separated for longer than a year (Patton, 2005). If there was any risk at all, the interview was carried out at a public venue.

Decisions were also made between myself and the participants about a safe procedure for telephone contact and receiving the information package, completed transcripts and the summary of results, in order to avoid detection. If the ex-partner was particularly dangerous or intrusive and there were potential negative ramifications for participating, it was decided that the interview would not proceed at all. As noted by Bancroft and Silverman (2002), some men who use domestic violence are non-threatening for a period after the relationship ends but become threatening and use intimidation when they become aware that their former partner has begun a new relationship. There were three women in this situation where extra care was taken because their ex-partners had become more intrusive in response to the fact that the women had re-partnered. No interview failed to proceed because of safety reasons.

Protecting participants from emotional harm

I was also concerned to address the emotional distress participants may experience during the interview process. The recounting of their experiences and the reading of the transcripts could potentially exacerbate the effects of the trauma of their abuse. To minimise the risk of emotional harm:

1. I contracted at the beginning of each interview that participants could ask for a break, refrain from answering questions, and terminate the interview or their involvement in the research at any time. Most of the women requested a break but none of the women took up any of the other options.
2. I asked permission to audiotape the interview but also demonstrated the 'off' button and gave the explanation and invitation to turn the tape off, or ask me to, if they felt uncomfortable or overcome with emotion. Several women took up the option of turning off the tape for certain sections of their interview and then allowing the content to be included in their transcripts after it was edited.
3. I prepared a list of relevant referral agencies and specific people with whom the women could make contact for debriefing and counselling support if needed. This proved unnecessary.
4. I informed each participant of my counselling work and experience in issues of domestic violence. I discussed my ability to interview with sensitivity, awareness, respect and support for participants, particularly if they were feeling strong emotions. Clearly, however, of greater importance than the words I spoke was the ability for me to convey with my attitude and demeanour the ability to stay present to, contain and be empathic towards strong emotions as they arose. This in itself reduced participant anxiety.
5. I included the types of questions I might ask in the interview process in the information sheet. I was going to reiterate these at the beginning of the interview so that the participant was fully informed and comfortable rather than taken by

surprise, but it soon became evident that this was unnecessary. It was clearly more useful for the participants to let the story unfold in their own way.

Protecting the researcher from physical harm

Through my counselling work I was well aware of the potential for vindictive and revengeful behaviour towards women by men who use abusive and violent behaviours. I had witnessed it as a counsellor and I knew the risks and the relevant literature. However, my own physical and emotional well-being as a researcher became just as important for me to address as that of the participants (Skinner, Hester & Malos, 2005, p. 15).

I took several steps to minimise detection by a violent ex-partner. Although participants were informed of my identity, I used a false name for all public documents such as the information sheet and pamphlet. I established a new university email address that matched the false name, to prevent my surname being used to obtain my address from the phone book. I also obtained a pre-paid mobile for participant contact and for use as an answering machine for participants during the research. This number was used on the information sheet and pamphlet. The answering message also used my false name.

Protecting the researcher from emotional harm

I had not anticipated the immensity of the process I would undertake at a personal level as a result of interviewing 30 women whose stories would feature multiple and ongoing victimisation. I had told myself I was focusing on the women's strengths and resilience and how they had resisted oppression and were redeveloping their lives. I was prepared for the idea that 'the ethics of commitment exposes feminist interviewers to stress, particularly in studies of traumatised women' (Reinharz, 1992, p. 34). I understood and had reflected upon the fact that, despite my best intentions, intense stress reactions to stories of pain could negatively affect my interviewing capacity. I had counted on my counselling skills and work in the area of domestic violence to mitigate this possibility and to be of benefit to both myself and the participants.

However, despite being a counsellor, I was unprepared for the potential of this research to be such an overwhelmingly stressful and emotional experience. Power (1998) discusses a similar experience: ‘this ideal of the researcher as dispassionately distanced from the researched has increasingly been called into question by feminist researchers ... my preparation for my own emotional responses proved to be insufficient ...’ (Power, 1998, p. 53).

The research process elicited intense emotional reactions in me that have also been identified by other feminist researchers (for example, Thompson, 1990; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Kelly, 1988; Kirkwood, 1993; Power, 1998; Patton, 2005). The whole research process, including the preliminary reading, designing, recruitment, interviewing, transcribing and analysing phases, ‘guaranteed exposure to endless waves of pain’ (van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009, p. 263).

Post-interview effects such as anxiety and depression were also been noted by feminist researchers. Reinharz (1992) surmised that this was the result of uncovering more pain in the women’s lives than the researchers had suspected and that ‘the shock of such discovery may eventually force her to confront her own vulnerability’ (Reinharz, 1992, p. 36). I would agree with this. My experience was also of intense stress reactions both during and after the interview process, as well as whilst transcribing, analysing and writing up. Not only did I notice deterioration in my emotional equilibrium, I was concerned for the way I felt my research skills were affected. I learned to refrain from interviewing more than once a week and I reduced my exposure to abuse and violence as a counsellor.

Thompson (1990) reflects on how she found herself using various means with which to escape the pain of multiple forms of victimisation contained within the women’s stories. This occurred both within the interview and whilst transcribing. I also found myself struggling with unconscious avoidant tactics. I recall resisting the temptation to exit several interviews prematurely, as the last half hour was often when the women would raise their experiences of sexual abuse within their relationships. It seemed that the women felt safe enough by then to speak of this sensitive and private

area of their lives. Paradoxically, this was often the hardest abuse for me to listen to, as the levels and layers of assault on their sexual dignity, needs and boundaries appeared to be such an inevitable but repugnant outcome of the way the women had described being treated in their relationships. During the transcribing process, I would, like Thompson, fall asleep or become agitated and restless.

The transcribers also experienced the emotional impact of listening to the interviews. It was an important duty of care to debrief them both carefully, as they found the tapes disturbing and depressing.

Recovery or transformation

At every stage, however, I can now see that being shaken to my core by my despair and outrage at the trauma and injustice contained within the women's stories did more than just culminate in particular cognitive, physical and emotional changes within me. These, I note, have been variously referred in previous research as: an 'unmanaged heart' (Power, 1998, p. 53); burnout or compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995); countertransference (Sabin-Farrell & Turpin, 2003; Dunkley & Whelan, 2006); secondary stress syndrome (Baird & Kracen, 2006); vicarious traumatisation (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Morrison, 2007) and its attendant stigmatisation (Brescher, 2004). Campbell (2002) makes the observation that there is no provision in research norms for such effects on the researcher. Whereas I knew I was enduring the emotional hard work out of deep respect for the participants and in the hope that contributing to research in this area may instigate change, I gradually realised there was a deeper, more transformative process possible than hoping to simply recover from this research experience.

At various stages within the research process, the disorientation I experienced, or 'inner disequilibrium in which the harmony of the self is disturbed yet the problem is neither understood or satisfactorily named' (Keane, cited in Mezirow, 1991, p. 177) was mitigated by 'one of the best antidotes to vicarious traumatisation' (Pearlman & Caringi, 2009, p. 215). Pearlman and Caringi remark that by 'opening oneself to the darker aspects of human experience', which this research continually demanded of

me, one can undergo a process of ‘vicarious transformation’ (Pearlman & Caringi, 2009, p. 215). This five year process has contributed to my personal and professional development as a woman, a social worker, a teacher and in particular as a counsellor. I have grown and changed on many levels that defy and are perhaps minimised by description.

The process of vicarious transformation resonates with the transformation process of learning described by Mezirow (1991). Mezirow believes that: ‘any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation. These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self’ (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). A major area of contention in the learning transformation literature is Mezirow's emphasis on rationality. For example, Boyd (1989) describes transformation as not so much a rational process but a ‘fundamental change in one's personality involving [together] the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration’. Grabov (1997, p. 90) suggests that it is more of an ‘intuitive, creative and emotional process’. Whilst I was unable to see this in the earlier stages of this research, going through the immense discomfort and distress of realising the suffering the participants had endured was a grief process as much as a learning process.

Such a process was not necessarily a conscious choice. I gradually became aware of it as a result of positive, constructive feedback at different stages of the journey.

The role of feedback

As with other feminist researchers (for example, Schwartz, cited in Skinner et al. 2005, p. 16) I was acutely aware that non-feminist colleagues would be quick to ridicule my work and that I was in contact with professionals who were quick to scapegoat women who were having trouble with post-separation shared parenting arrangements, despite the presence of domestic violence. However, presenting the research findings to my supervisors, the University of Tasmania School of Sociology and Social Work Seminar Series, regional, state and national conferences, committees and a subsection of participants provided critical, astute and positive feedback which

greatly contributed to my growing self-awareness. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) also argue that a valuable process for enhancing trustworthiness is to present one's findings to a critical audience. These issues of trustworthiness and reflexivity, and addressing my responses to the trauma of the women's experience, became intertwined for me.

Serendipitous and planned meetings with participants also provided positive feedback that enhanced my sense of purpose and allowed me to integrate and grow from the shock of the levels of victimisation within the women's stories. Looking back, I have 'bumped into' many of the participants well after the interview process. Sometimes this was one or two years after their interview. The overwhelmingly positive and grateful feedback they gave me both on the positive effects of the interview and their delight at the sense I had made of the data often elevated me out of a mire of self-doubt and lethargy. The use I was able to make of my research findings when I resumed my counselling work was further confirmation that all had not been lost. I had developed personal strengths in containing and responding to stories of trauma; in being able to deal with the stress reactions whilst interviewing, and in staying present to the women's stories and needs without inwardly disintegrating or escaping.

The end result of the development of a conceptualisation of the dynamics and effects of domestic violence gave me a new language with which to work with women. With this approach they were more able to articulate their experiences and therefore extricate themselves from a state of confusion and disempowerment to a place of clarity and possibilities for positive action. I was also able to observe the healing processes, strength and resilience of women who had been harmed. This in turn gave me the confidence to take social action with this research.

Feminist sign-posts

In retrospect, beyond fostering safety measures and strategies to deal with the stress and recovery from research processes that involve dwelling in the darker side of human experience, a provision of feminist sign-posts for the inevitable descent into, exploration of and ascent from this 'underworld' of human pain and misery could

foster growth or transformation in researchers that moves far beyond recovery from ‘vicarious traumatising’.

Similarly, I wonder if a feminist standpoint approach, in taking a reflexive stance to research (Lather, 1991) could extend beyond the need only to address the ethics and strategies of preventing harm. It may be useful to include a process of debriefing and recovery for participants, particularly in research that invites stories of oppression and trauma. I refer here to ‘the ambiguities and contradictions’ (Power, 1998, p. 119) in the role of the researcher. Primarily, I am concerned with whether a feminist researcher is ethically committed to leaving participants in a ‘better state’ for having told their stories, as opposed to a ‘recovered’ state, and how that might be achieved.

Trauma stewardship

The recent work of social worker, van Denoot Lipsky’s (2009) approach to trauma stewardship – caring for self while caring for others – ‘erodes the artificial line between sufferer and helper’ and the indirect and direct experience of trauma. She notes the commonalities underlying the diversity of response patterns when exposed to human trauma. She lays the groundwork for a practice of ‘trauma stewardship’ that is relevant to those who confront oppression and trauma in their lives or their work. She provides a ‘compass and a map’ for the journey that involves a process of renewal or self-transformation from trauma exposure responses as ‘only by understanding the topography of the land that you are lost in can you begin to plot the wisest way out’ (van Denoot Lipsky, 2009, p. 46). Anticipating, preparing for and exploring responses to trauma exposure in order to develop a practice of trauma mastery and stewardship could be a requirement for researchers who are embarking on projects such as this. It would significantly address the issue of duty of care to participants who take up a research invitation to speak of their trauma, past or present.

Data Analysis

This section begins with a description and justification of the decision to use a thematic analysis of the data. The stages in defining a commonality of dynamics between the women and their ex-partners are then explained.

Thematic analysis

The idea of expanding the perceptual efficacy of the researcher by ‘consciously using different lenses’ was developed by Peshkin (2001, p. 238). Peshkin notes that whether researchers have a particular lens or not, ‘we are never without a sense of our research purpose’. The intentional ‘lens’ through which I analysed the data was shaped by several factors. As a social work practitioner, I was concerned at the issues that arise for women and their children if domestic violence is inadequately addressed in the trend towards shared parenting post-separation. I believe that the Australian social work profession needs to develop a coherent understanding of and response to domestic violence. The 30 women who provided rich data on their lived experience also indicated that a core reason for participating was the hope of using their experiences to help improve the lives of other women. They hoped, as I did, to contribute to change. Employing a thematic analysis met the aims and purpose of this study, as it: facilitated a synthesis of the information collected from all 30 participants; allowed different insights in the ‘quest to understand a phenomenon’ (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 6); and facilitated the communication of these insights to a broad audience (Boyatzis, 1998).

Yet one of the difficulties with thematic analysis is perhaps the influence of unintentional or unconscious lenses which may have altered or even decreased my ‘angles of vision’ (Peshkin, 2001, p. 238). Eisner (1991, p. 67) reminds us that ‘... a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing’. In order to meet the aims and purpose of this study, I chose a qualitative feminist standpoint approach that shines a particular lens on domestic violence. I consciously balanced this standpoint’s focus on understanding the mechanics of domination with the possibility that this preoccupation may reduce my lens so much as to preclude other useful information. I

acknowledged that not only would my past experiences, reading of the literature and interpretations have influenced the methodological design of this study and the way I asked questions of the women, they would also affect the perceptual lens through which I asked questions of the data (Hatch, 2002).

A reflexive researcher is aware that themes in the data ‘do not emerge on their own. They are driven by what the inquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets ...’ (Srivastava, 2009, p. 77). I resolved this conundrum with the words of Boyatzis (1998, p. 6) on data analysis: ‘Various methods contribute different insights in the quest to understand a phenomenon’. With this understanding, I undertook thematic analysis in the various stages of analysis in order to contribute to an understanding of the lived experience of women. The approach I took in this study was primarily inductive and emic. I, like Barritt (1986) thought the heart of the matter lay in the unexamined, common events and experiences of the women’s everyday life and finding the shared themes that lay concealed within the descriptions of these experiences.

I analysed the data thematically for commonalities as well as contradictions. This involved the development of generalisations from specific observations (Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p. 54) and noting the emergence of possible patterns from the data when reading through the transcripts (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p. 9).

At the interview stage I had been very interested in the women’s perceptions of their relationships apart from incidents and episodes of recognised abuse such as physical violence. I had paid attention to what the lesser known roles of emotional and psychological abuse may have been within their relationships, although disquieted by both the lack of clear definition of these forms of abuse and a reluctance to apply labels to the women’s experiences.

However, it was in these areas of the interview that I noted a heightened emotion and a common struggle to find words adequate to articulate and convey an overwhelming sense of injustice and despair. Sociologist Marjorie DeVault (2004) suggests

researchers pay close attention to what might come across as muted language: ‘... halting, tentative talk signals the realm of not-quite-articulated experience, where standard vocabulary is inadequate...’ (DeVault, 2004, p. 235). The descriptions of the periods between any episodes and incidences of currently understood abuse provided a wealth of information, both in what was said and in particular what was struggled to be said. Here, the similarity between the women was clear, and patterns of key words, phrases and sentences, as well as periods of hesitancy, doubt, confusion, pauses and painful emotions, emerged from the data. Transcriptions were therefore not ‘sanitised’ and included all aspects of the interview such as pauses, sighs, laughing and identifiable emotional responses of any kind.

Data analysis was accomplished in four main phases or stages. However, it was a circuitous and at times highly abstract process that is difficult to communicate in a methodical and linear fashion (Srivastava, 2009). Whereas I tried using NVIVO 7 (qualitative research and data analysis software) I found that this actually inhibited me from being able to follow the commonalities in the patterns I had already noted in the women’s experiences. I decided to spend time immersing myself in the data, concentrating on emerging patterns and their connections to the women’s post-separation experiences.

First stage

Through the cyclical, reflexive and iterative (Srivastava, 2009) process of interviewing, transcribing, analysing and then conducting further interviews, I had an early and growing appreciation of a distinct similarity and rhythm to the pre- and post-separation relationships and experiences of each of the women. The commonalities of words, descriptions, emotions and issues between the women’s stories were evident. Both transcribers also remarked on the similarities between all the stories.

There were patterns within the stories that seemed predictable and relentless and could not be ignored. For example, although the initial focus of this study was on post-separation, it was clearly not possible to ‘divorce that experience from its

context and its history' (Thomas, 2009, p. 120). Through the process of data collection, I came to an understanding that the post-separation experience was entwined with, and an extension of, the pre-separation experience.

The first stage of data analysis was a methodical and lengthy process of immersing myself in the women's stories in preparation for a more creative approach (Patton, 1990). I continuously returned to this stage and made adjustments as my observations shifted. First, I worked with hard copies of each transcript. I read and reread the transcripts in a lengthy effort to code the data (Minichiello et al., 2000) in preparation for generating themes. This entailed searching for and highlighting key words, phrases, sentences and events. I wrote a summary of each woman's story at the end of the computerised copy of each transcript, as well as recording any thoughts, ideas or observations within the transcript itself. I found this was useful on both the computerised copies and on the hard copies. I documented the responses of each women relating to the sections of my interview guide, as well as those parts of the story that did not.

At this stage, the stories fell easily into five macro themes. These were:

1. Descriptions of physically violent or abusive episodes in their pre-separation relationships;
2. Descriptions of patterns within the relationship;
3. The impact of living with their ex-partner;
4. Post-separation parenting issues; and
5. Factors affecting the redevelopment of their post-separation life.

I further collapsed these macro themes into micro themes for each story. This entailed further rereading all transcripts and resulted in a list of themes under each macro theme, for each woman's story. I used a spreadsheet to visually track the macro and micro themes for each story, including page numbers for relevant quotes.

Second stage

I found the interconnections between the women's stories were then able to come into focus. This stage entailed a focus on the meta themes that 'transversed and connected' (Thomas, 2009, p. 121) the themes within each woman's story. I transposed the variety of meta themes that linked each women's story on to a spreadsheet. This was a complex and lengthy procedure, with many attempts to refine both the meta themes and their interconnections.

I also wrote, rewrote and refined a common narrative or storyline of the women's experiences of their relationships as it emerged. This consisted of four sub-plots: meeting and developing a relationship with their partners; the reasons for feeling off balance, trapped and unable to effect any change; the physical and psychological effects on the women of living in these relationships; and the consequences for post-separation shared parenting. This process led into the third stage of data analysis.

Third stage

Peshkin (2001) points out that:

... in any form of qualitative research, inseparability is inescapable: things are connected. We wrench them from their contexts knowing that we do a disservice to their natural interrelatedness; we must do this if we are not to be paralysed by the immense complexity of the world of social phenomena (Peshkin, 2001, p. 247).

The pursuit of connections between and within the women's stories led to the generation of a variety of visual representations of the women's lived experience. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 91) call such visual representations 'data displays' that allow a systematic representation of the data with a focus on the relationship between parts and the entirety. Buzan (1991) and Russell (2009) use the term 'mind maps' and describe them as useful tools for summarising, consolidating and presenting information, to observe cross linkages and encourage a solution oriented and creative thinking approach.

This stage prompted a lengthy, circuitous and abstract process of data analysing. I sought the deeper underlying, overarching or linking patterns that connected the women's stories of their pre-separation relationships and experimented with several types of visual representations of the interconnections that emerged. I also explored the connections between their pre- separation and post-separation experiences and continually searched for the appropriate language to fit the patterns. I filed all these attempts so that I could trace the development of my ideas.

Two building blocks emerged as constants throughout this process of mind mapping. The first was a description by the women of core attitudes and behaviours used consistently by their partners to control them. The second was the aspects of their relationships that were affected by these core attitudes and behaviours. I wanted to represent the chronic nature of abuse and the relationships between the different forms of abuse recognised in domestic violence.

No matter how much I made 'sure to lay out the words of people who do not fit the pattern', as advised by Karp (in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 341), the diverse experiences described by the women in this study were underpinned by a similar structural pattern. At this stage, I emailed 10 of the participants the visual representations I had developed to check whether it resonated with their experiences. I selected these 10 women from those who had an email address, were not in any danger from receiving such an email and who had indicated they would be interested in responding to my initial findings. I received a positive and enthusiastic response from the nine women who responded. This gave me the impetus to continue to refine this procedure.

Fourth stage

I finally settled on a visual representation that displayed several common elements of the women's lived experience of abuse pre separation. These were:

1. The chronic and interrelated aspects of the abuse;
2. The possibility but not the inevitability of physical violence in this pattern;

3. The women's sense of being trapped;
4. The women's lack of equality, agency and autonomy; and
5. The futility of their resistance to the abuse.

To draw attention to the fact that these dynamics did not necessarily include physical violence, I divided the 30 narratives into two groups based on their experience of physical violence from their partners. One group had experienced either one or many incidents of physical violence from their partners. The other group had not. I selected quotes from each group in order to convey the commonality of the dynamics to all the women and how these dynamics predisposed their partners to using physical violence towards the women. This explained why some of the women experienced physical violence: within the pre- but not post-separation relationship; within the post- but not pre-separation relationship; within both the pre-and post-separation; or not at all.

Once the map of the dynamics underpinning the women's relationships was clear, it gave structure and meaning to the way I presented the data from the other macro themes. I developed a second map that focused on the effects of and the impact on the women of these dynamics. The effects also explained the success of the dynamics in maintaining the women's subjugation.

A third map displayed the post-separation continuation of the pre-separation dynamics in the women's lives. As the significance of the first and second maps became clear, it was too limiting to confine the focus of the third map to the post-separation shared parenting experiences described by the women. The range and diversity of the women's post-separation experiences of their ex-partner were not limited to the specific features of their shared parenting arrangements. Therefore the third map explains the extent to which the dynamics continued post-separation for the women in this study.

Each map was then used as the framework for the three results chapters. The quotes were selected to represent the overarching pattern in the women's narratives. They were powerful examples of the women's own words, and drew attention to the

nuances of each theme. I was careful to preserve each woman's anonymity and to include a reasonably even distribution of quotes from each woman.

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

This chapter has focused on the methodological and research design framework for this study. The use of a qualitative approach using feminist standpoint theory was justified as the most suitable methodological framework for meeting the purpose and aims of this research. Non-probability purposive and particularly snowball sampling were discussed, along with the qualitative feminist interviewing methods that were applied to generate women's accounts of their experiences of domestic violence and post-separation shared parenting. An in-depth discussion of the ethical commitment to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and safety from physical or emotional harm guiding the research process was presented. I also considered issues of responding to trauma in participant's lives. Finally, the four stages of the data analysis process were outlined.

This concludes the theoretical and research foundations upon which this research is based. In the following three chapters, I present the themes generated from this research process and the data analysis.

Chapter Four: A Web of Abuse

Introduction

Same dog, different leg action... (Jessica, P2)

This is the first data chapter to address the research question, ‘In a context of domestic violence, how do women experience post-separation shared parenting arrangements?’. This chapter reports on the women’s experiences of their partner pre-separation. As noted in Chapter Three, although the focus of this study had been on post-separation experiences, exploring the pre-separation experience became a crucial link to understanding the women’s post-separation experience. The purpose of this chapter is three-fold. First, it is to highlight the similarity with which the women described the dynamics of their relationships irrespective of their diversity of experience, including physical violence. Second, it is to describe the web of abuse created by these dynamics. Third, it is to convey the nature and extent of the web of abuse on all the women in this study. Fourth, it provides the basis on which the data related to the post-separation shared parenting experiences of the women was analysed and presented in Chapter Six.

Whilst each woman’s story was unique and the women were cognisant of how their own personalities, lack of skills or other circumstances may have created a level of conflict and difficulty with their partner, there was a deeper pattern discernible. I describe this pattern as the dynamics of their relationships. Although the dynamics were observable in the narratives of all the women, they did not always include the use of physical or sexual violence. However, they created the potential for such violence to occur, particularly post-separation.

The dynamics within the women’s relationships created a web of abuse. The origin of the web was the women’s experience of their partner’s superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes. These attitudes led to an impenetrable matrix of double standards and double binds. They also produced a particular behavioural style towards the women characterised by a concerted and relentless pattern of boundary violations. The web of abuse ensured the women’s overall defeat in their attempts for

autonomy, agency or equality and resulted in shared experiences of oppression. I grouped these experiences according to whether they occurred within the women's physical or sexual relationship with their partners, within their economic or social arrangements, within their communication patterns or in their public portrayal. The nature and extent of the web of abuse forms the basis from which the data concerning the impact of the relationship is analysed and presented in Chapter Five.

Quotes are used verbatim from the participants' narratives. The ellipses within the quotes are where extraneous words or phrases have been omitted in order to maximise the representation of as many women as possible within the limited space of this study. Unless I state otherwise, there was a consistent emergence of each theme for each woman in this study. This is a particularly noticeable feature of the data up to the section on boundary violations in the final section of the chapter. I begin by clarifying the core attitudes described by the women. I then present the double standards and double binds created by these attitudes. This is followed by an explanation of the different types of boundary violations. Finally, I illustrate the consequences of these within each aspect of the relationship and present a pictorial representation of the web of abuse.

Two groups of women

Of common concern for the women in this study was the social and legal tendency to address only the most obvious symptoms of physical violence but not the full ramifications of domestic violence. This was particularly detrimental for post-separation shared parenting issues. In response, I decided in the latter stages of data analysis to group the women's narratives – Group 1 and Group 2 – on the basis of whether they reported physical violence or not. This also served to highlight an emerging trend in the data analysis: that the relationships described by the women in this study were characterised by a similar set of dynamics irrespective of whether they experienced physical violence.

Group 1 includes the narratives of 16 women who did not report physical violence in their pre-separation relationship. Of these women, seven were no longer involved in shared parenting arrangements of any kind. The children had reached the age of 18, or in the case of Jodie, Hayley and Carol for example, the father had refused further contact. The quotes from the women in this group are followed by their pseudonym and the letter N.

Group 2 includes the narratives of 14 women who experienced physical violence in their relationships. Physical violence refers to being shirt-fronted, pushed, shoved, kicked, dragged, slapped, hit, punched, thrown, thrown at, burned, assaulted with a weapon, suffocated, strangled or hung. Of these women, five were no longer in current post-separation shared parenting arrangements. For example, Barbara's children were over 18 at the time of interview whereas the ex-partners of Alice, Jessica and Jasmine eventually refused further contact. Emanon fled the state in which she lived. The quotes from the women in this group are followed by their pseudonym and the letter P, followed by either the number 1 or 2.

P1 stands for infrequent experiences of physical violence during the relationship. Elle, Alice, Sally and Anita for example, experienced between one and five episodes of physical violence during the course of the relationship. In Elle's first relationship she experienced one incident of physical violence where she was strangled and suffocated. In her second she was slapped in the face. Alice experienced one incident of severe punching and another of being dragged and shoved. Sally experienced one incident of being suffocated and strangled, and one incident of being hit and pushed. Anita experienced several incidents of being shirt-fronted, one incident of having a heavy item thrown at her, and another of being pushed and shoved.

P2 stands for frequent physical abuse within the relationship. Sam, Sharni, Veronica, Summer, Sebrina, Jasmine, Emanon, Penny, Barbara, and Jessica, for example, experienced regular physical violence from their partners.

Quotes are drawn from Group 1 and Group 2 in order to convey the similarity of the women's perceptions and experiences of their relationships, irrespective of the number of episodes of physical violence they experienced from their partners.

The following table summarises the two groups of women.

Table 1: Two Groups of Women

Group 1 No physical violence from partner pre-separation Shared parenting current at time of interview	Group 2 Experienced physical violence pre-separation Shared parenting current at time of interview
1. Amy, N	1. Elle, P1
2. Karly, N	2. Sally, P1
3. Lola Lucia, N	3. Anita, P1
4. Cassandra, N	4. Penny, P2
5. Caroline, N	5. Sam, P2
6. Jane, N	6. Sharni, P2
7. Gabrielle, N	7. Veronica, P2
8. Genevieve, N	8. Summer, P2
9. Virginia, N	9. Sebrina, P2
Shared parenting finished at time of interview	Shared parenting finished at time of interview
10. Hayley, N	10. Alice, P1
11. Collette, N	11. Jasmine, P2
12. Wendy, N	12. Emanon, P2
13. Sue, N	13. Barbara, P2
14. Carol, N	14. Jessica, P2
15. Jodie, N	
16. Leanne, N	

Core Attitudes

The theme of domination and control was fundamental to the narratives of all the women regarding their pre-separation relationship. It was characteristic of each woman's description of their partner's attitudes and behaviours irrespective of whether they had used physical violence towards them. Within this theme three primary issues emerged. The most significant issue was the women's perception of a chronic power differential in the relationship. A second issue was their perception of their partner's expectations of privilege and control. Third, the women spoke of their partner's highly competitive and adversarial approach to the relationship. These aspects of the relationship left the women feeling a sense of inequality, a lack of autonomy and powerless to effect any change.

Superiority (he saw himself as more important)

*To him, I was a second class citizen...he was more special somehow...
(Genevieve, N)*

There were repeated expressions by every woman of experiencing a chronic power differential within the relationship. There were several aspects to this experience. Virginia, Jane and Sally convey the women's overall sense of a lack of equality between themselves and their partners:

*Equality wasn't exactly something I thought about...there wasn't any
though...at all... (Virginia, N)*

*We were not equals...He always had the upper hand in everything and made
the decisions... (Sally, P1)*

The extent of the power differential perceived by all the women is made clear by Elle, Summer and Sue:

*He was the king and I was the worker...they are like little Hitlers born
again...the same with my second ex...Hitlerism... (Elle, P1)*

I was just a servant... (Summer, P2)

I was just his slave... (Sue, N)

There were consistent and regular references to the fact that their partners regarded themselves as superior. Penny, Emanon, Summer and Genevieve relate their inferior status to their partners:

He said... Without me you are rubbish... (Penny, P2)

I wasn't the doormat: I was the dirt under the door mat (Emanon, P2)

He just thought I was the scum of the earth... (Summer, P2)

I don't think there was any possible way he could have seen me as more inferior if he tried... (Genevieve, N)

All the narratives conveyed a sense of being treated as an extension of their partner rather than as a person in their own right. Penny, Collette and Gabrielle represent these views:

He was looking to be looked after, cherished and to be put on a pedestal... (Penny, P2)

He wouldn't allow me to be me. He liked the look of me: I was a bit of a trophy...it was nice for him to have me... (Collette, N)

I'd forgotten how to care for me...it was all so far about him that I probably didn't even think about him being concerned about me...it didn't even cross my mind... (Gabrielle, N)

A related perception common to all the women was a perception of their partner's sense of ownership over them. Sam, Jessica, Penny and Genevieve explain the feeling of being owned rather than treated as a partner:

The way I put it is, I was not a person to him, and I was a possession. You treat a person one way, a possession is something you own and you treat any bloody way you like... You know, it is yours...I wasn't allowed to do anything without his permission or else I would cop a backhander... (Sam, P2)

I was not a person to him... I was there for his purposes and his purposes only. I was a commodity (Jessica, P2)

It was always subtly evident that I shouldn't leave him because I belonged to him. You know, you are my wife so you will stay here because you love me...and there was always sort of an undercurrent feeling that if I did leave, he would come and bring me home...(Penny, P2)

I felt owned...when I look back that's really how it was. There was this unspoken thing about having to receive his permission or...like 'or else'... there would be trouble...he would say to me, I give you permission! (Genevieve, N)

Their partner's sense of superiority and ownership inevitably created a sense of entitlement. This was evident in the way the women felt expected to adapt to their partners in ways that were at their expense and not reciprocated.

Entitled (he expected me to adapt to him)

His attitude to me was it was his way or the highway... (Virginia, N)

The women described the way their partners constantly privileged their own standards, ideas, opinions, needs and wants in the relationship. They felt expected to accommodate, adjust and adapt to their partner without this being reciprocated. If they did not do this correctly, they were made to feel very uncomfortable. Jane, Collette and Carol point out how this sense of entitlement affected the whole relationship:

I had to conform to his standards at all times. I had my own secret life which kept me sane and able to deal with my other life... (Jane, N)

He started demanding things from the start really... I was trying to please him all the time. Give him, be what he wanted me to be... I didn't have the right to expect...I really tried very hard to be the way that he wanted me to be...which is pretty shocking to me now when I think about it...it took up tremendous amounts of energy...there always seemed so much I had to watch out for... (Collette, N)

The rules changed every day and like so this is how we are doing it today...how the hell am I to know this...I never felt that I had a voice in any of this... (Carol, N)

Sebrina, Barbara, Gabrielle and Genevieve give examples common to all the women of how their partner's sense of entitlement set the standards within the relationship:

He was the one in charge, it was as if he didn't think I could or even should survive without him telling me what to do (Sebrina, P2)

He really used to try and manipulate me, the way I thought, what I did, what I wore...he would go off to work and he would have a list of things I would have to do, have done, before he got home... (Barbara, P2)

It was up to me to keep everything smooth...if it wasn't smooth it was my fault...that's how I felt at the time...and he got really...sulky is not the word...his whole demeanor and body language changed...and I just knew he wasn't happy and I needed to do something to make him happy... (Gabrielle, N)

He thought his ideas, his needs and his way were vastly more important and he would literally scoff at or dismiss mine...and indicate somehow that there was something wrong with me for thinking or feeling differently to him... (Genevieve, N)

Their partner's superior and entitled attitudes appeared to be maintained by an adversarial approach to each of the women. The women experienced being defeated by their partner's adversarial and competitive attitude to the relationship.

Adversarial (he believed he should win and be right)

I was in a win/lose situation. He always won, I always lost... (Sam, P2)

The women explained their partner's approach to the relationship as highly competitive. Their partner's chronic pursuit of winning and being in the right made it difficult to communicate or negotiate issues within the relationship. This also led to adversarial behaviour that defeated the women's attempts for equality, autonomy and agency.

Cassandra, for example, felt her partner actually believed he was always right and Elle describes her partner as always getting what he wanted. These feelings were common to all the women:

...everything he wants, says, and does is right... (Cassandra, N)

He was just stubborn and that was his way. What he wanted, he got...I had no say in the relationship because he told me when I tried to negotiate with him that's the way it's going to be. He left me with nothing to say... (Elle, P1)

Karly describes the effort to which she went in the relationship to negotiate with her partner:

I used to really work on how if I put it in these words, if I present it in this way he can't help but understand he won't be able to help to see what I mean I'm sure it'll make sense to him and he'll hear what I've got to say and you know even when I did that I'd still come out of it saying, yes you're right, I am sorry. I can remember doing it and hear myself saying: yeah, I am sorry I brought it up. I am sorry I said that...thinking, how did I feel like that was so right 10 minutes ago for me to talk about that and now I am feeling like I am out of order...you are not entitled to say I don't like this so you just can't win... (Karly, N)

Penny, Sebrina, Jane and Sue explain the futility common to all the women of trying to get their partner to see the relevance of their viewpoint or way of doing things.

There was a gradual sense of defeat in countering their partner's adversarial standpoint:

...it's never going to be relevant to [him]...so why waste my breath... (Penny, P2)

I was desperate to prove [to him] that I wasn't a liar or neurotic...even now he says I make life hard for him... (Sebrina, P2)

I had to come to terms with the fact that I can't win with him...we very rarely had arguments because in the end, I just wouldn't argue...he wouldn't have seen reason in what I had to say so it didn't matter, there was just no point and there still is really no point because he still doesn't see that he was ever in the wrong... (Jane, N)

I automatically accommodated his strange behaviour...it is just what was done...I just accommodated...there was no point in discussing it... (Sue, N)

Although the women resisted being treated like this, their partners did not respond well if they tried to set boundaries. A particularly strong theme common in the women's narratives was how such an adversarial stance led to punishment. The women learnt to behave in a manner which avoided upsetting their partner.

Repercussions could be vengeful, irrespective of whether their partner had ever been physically violent. Collette, Sebrina and Sharni convey the range of consequences of standing up to a partner with adversarial attitudes:

She might realise she is entitled to it...a more egalitarian relationship...but she also realises that if she tries to take it, it will create such havoc that she thinks it is not worth all that effort (Collette, N)

Where can I set good boundaries without being repercussions...I avoid doing things that might make him hit the roof... because he gets so spiteful, so cruel and mean...I was a bit afraid he might hurt me to get the insurance... (Sebrina, P2)

...he would never let go, he was always right and if I didn't do as he said, he would victimise me, blackmail me mentally...and persecute me... (Sharni, P2)

The women clarified the anger, aggression and threats that erupted if they took a stand and said no to their partners or just refused to accommodate and comply. Karly and Gabrielle describe how they had altered their behaviour to avoid the hostility, blame and aggression that might ignite from taking a stand:

It was mostly oppressive but when once I pulled out and said that's it, ah that's when it all started to come out. That's when you start to see what was always there but you, because of how you kept readjusting and... and treading around it and not rocking the boat, it didn't come out but it was always going to come out if you ever did any of those things...just really aggressive, angry stuff...I mean that was there on and off a lot but...but constant anger, agro and, oh bitter, nasty, mean...revengeful...vengeful sort of behaviour. He was so angry...That was about, I'm so angry with you. I'm going to treat you now like this... (Karly, N)

I knew his temper, I had seen his temper and I didn't want to see the temper...it scared me if he lost it...so I kept things smooth...he'd always get crabby and throw things he was working on...the hammer or chair...anything...the house would get wrecked...I never got a sorry...he would say, I wasn't aiming at you, I wouldn't have hit you...he would never acknowledge his temper was impacting on me...the children bring up stuff about his temper now...it wasn't until the end when I actually didn't cater to him that things started getting really bad... (Gabrielle, N)

The hostility underlying threats typically encountered by the women when they refused to accommodate any longer is well articulated by Wendy and Veronica:

My nurturing had stopped or my need to nurture him, my need to make it all right and he said to me...you've made my mother sick to the guts. And if you dare make her ill I'll come after you with a gun...That was the one time he threatened me with physical violence...that really scared me... (Wendy, N)

The more I stopped sort of feeding his need...the worse the relationship got. He was just furious, absolutely furious...if I had gone back to being submissive the relationship would still exist and there was no way I was going to do that...no way...I would rather live out on the street...thank you very much...than be treated like that again...the more I started to up the ante for me, then the relationship got worse... (Veronica, P2)

Being in relationship with a partner whose core attitudinal style was superior, entitled and adversarial resulted in the women's shared experiences of double standards. A constellation of double standards negatively impacted upon each participant throughout the entire relationship.

A Constellation of Double Standards

Rules for him and another set of rules for me... (Virginia, N)

The narratives of the women in this study indicated that their partner's core attitudinal style was reflected in an overall sense of entitlement to privilege their own expectations, needs and wants in the relationship. This set up a constellation of double standards which the women were not always fully aware of, or able to articulate, when in the relationship.

The following section illustrates the main double standards I detected within the women's narratives. They were highly interrelated and created an impenetrable yet elusive block to the women's equality, autonomy and agency within the relationship. Some double standards were visible as chronic and entrenched features of the women's entire relationship with her partner, whereas others tended to be more episodic and transitory.

Regardless of whether the various double standards were chronic or episodic features of the relationship, there were three features common to them all: they denied the women the same rights as their partner; they denied the women reciprocity from their partners; and they denied the women accountability from their partners.

I explain the constellation of double standards in the following order and illustrate them with quotes:

1. Denial of same rights
2. Denial of reciprocity
3. Denial of accountability

Denial of same rights

A double standard was evident in the way the women were denied the same rights as their partners had accorded themselves. This was visible, for example, in the way the women were denied the right to a voice, the right to economic and social autonomy, the right to physical and sexual respect and reciprocity, and the right to accurate public portrayal.

Penny and Gabrielle provide examples of how they were denied the same rights within their social arrangements with their partners:

He would refuse to be on time...would never honour arrangements...but I couldn't be late...if I was half an hour later than he expected me to be...it was all about, who have you been sleeping with... (Penny, P2)

I had to account for my time, he didn't... (Gabrielle, N)

Jodie, Anita and Penny express how double standards negated the women's attempts for economic equality:

I think being married and having responsibilities...not having his...he wanted the single life too. He'd always bring money as an issue why we couldn't do something but when it was something he wanted to do he could get the money when he wanted to... I got some money as compensation for an accident...once he realised I had the money he was expecting me to pay...he felt like what was anything I had was his too...but he would never give me any money and he wanted to be in charge of his own salary... (Jodie, N)

He gave me an allowance...I used to have to write out a budget to show I couldn't cope in order to get any more money...he spent what he liked... (Anita, P1)

He got very upset that I should have a bank account with money in it. He said...you have a joint bank account. What do you need a second one for? But he had one. He had a second one... (Penny, P2)

Denial of reciprocity

Another double standard was clear in the way the women were expected to take a caring, compromising, adjusting and accommodating role without any hope of reciprocity. Sally, Amy, Carol and Virginia clarify how this type of double standard permeated their relationship:

He wanted strict guidelines but he didn't stick to that. Then that made me aware there are lots of other things...whichever he wants life to go: he has a new rule suddenly. Or he will say ... 'that's my principle'. What about my principles? (Sally, P1)

I was willing to compromise...it took me a while to work out he wouldn't...I couldn't look at his mobile but he had to know about my life and what I was doing, who I was talking to...he would ring me constantly...He made the choices about what was private and what was not...without discussing it with me...even the sexual stuff...I thought if I pleased him in that way it would change things. Maybe he is sexually frustrated and, but there was never, ever any return... I kind of forced myself to do things, in the hope that would help. How subservient is that...? (Amy, N)

It's amazing how really my partner did not want to know me in the whole time we were married...I had to understand him and I had to fit around him... (Carol, N)

...he wanted to be treated as if he was special but there was no way he was going to treat me as if I was special... (Virginia, N)

The participants described double standards in their sexual relationships with their partners. Jessica, Anita and Elle portray the way these negated their attempts at sexual reciprocity:

So it was my job to put out. You know, that's basically the attitude... (Jessica, P2)

It wasn't about being tender and reciprocal...it was about feeding his ego... (Anita, P1)

He'd be pushy when he wanted it but I couldn't have it when I wanted it. If I said no to him he'd get all hot and pushy and force me then he'd go cold like it had never happened... (Elle, P1)

Hayley describes the double standard inherent in the way their partners could be flirtatious or promiscuous but sexually controlling of the women:

He was jealous...he accused me of having an affair with one of the guys and that's when I first thought...this guy is really trying to control me because I wasn't having an affair... My first son was only a baby and that's when he started wanting to see other women and I remember once again it was because he said I wasn't being a good wife...I didn't want to fuck him all the time...eventually he brought one of the women into the home...and he told me that he loved us both...He said that if he had been born in a different culture it would have been quite acceptable to have many wives...it was a cultural furphy that men were expected to have only one wife... (Hayley, N)

Denial of accountability

A further derivative of being denied the same rights was the denial of accountability. The women's partners felt entitled to use but not accept blame, criticism, analysis, accusations or defamation. For example, Genevieve, Jane and Sally describe their experience of such double standards within their partner's communication patterns and the ramifications of this for themselves and the relationship in general:

...it was like he held up a deflection board to me...any attempt I made to draw his attention to his contribution or lack of to something that had gone wrong was put back on me...I was being mouthy or manipulative...and yet he could accuse all he liked and I should accept that... (Genevieve, N)

...he didn't realise the consequences that he has...his actions have in the world...only the consequences of the world on him... (Jane, N)

He knew because if there were any problems he would say, don't blame me. That was always the first thing I heard....he was very keen to straight away lay the blame elsewhere and later when I said we need to lay blame nowhere when there's conflict...and he said yes, blame needs to be laid...you've got it all wrong. Blame has to always be made...He would also say, you are crazy, Sally, you come with these things...my husband made virtually out I was exceptionally, ah, fearful and it was wrong. I knew it was wrong but I had no one who would say, I know you, Sally, and what he's saying is nonsense...So that's very dangerous. No backup...he filled such a huge space...and I had to be very careful about what I said to him... (Sally, P1)

Hayley describes economic double standards. Her husband refused her the same rights he accorded himself by not allowing her to work yet not giving her adequate money to raise the children. She conveys a further double standard in her husband's representation of her to others with blame and defamation yet his refusal to be accountable for his own behaviour towards her:

I couldn't...didn't dare challenge or confront him about anything...yet he blamed me all the time...and he made out to his friends that I didn't budget or shop properly. Looking back on it now you realise that the people who were there also started treating you as if you were an idiot. I think there was probably a lot said I didn't know about that was designed to build a picture of me... (Hayley, N)

The women's attempts for equality, agency and autonomy within their relationships were negated by these three main double standards. Their narratives conveyed how living within the confines of double standards had oppressive consequences that could be traced throughout the relationship. The main outcome was being denied equality by their partners.

The presence of these three main double standards was the outcome of their partner's elevation of their own expectations, needs and ideas at the expense of those held by the women. When their partner's expectations, needs or ideas were contradictory, this created a further set of dilemmas. The women were then trapped in no-win predicaments, which I have called double binds.

A Constellation of Double Binds

No matter what I did, he put it down... (Summer, P2)

The women's narratives made regular references to how the imposition of their partner's expectations created tension and stress. When these expectations were contradictory, the stress was compounded. Their stories contained both episodic, unpredictable incidents and prolonged, chronic struggles where they tried in vain to accommodate and adjust to contradictory expectations. The participants had not

always been aware of or able to articulate this, but spoke of the frustration of ‘never being able to get it right’ or ‘not being able to win’.

The women described constantly struggling to gain their partner’s approval and to feel loved but receiving a negative response irrespective of how they behaved, spoke or thought. This is the well-known ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’ double bind.

The women’s narratives also reflected the experience of being trapped between any of the expectations underlying the double standards. For example, a double bind was evident in the women’s narratives where they were trapped between their partner’s expectations to be accommodated and catered to but not to have to reciprocate. Their partners would not and could not be depended on. I refer to this as the ‘revolve around me but do not depend on me’ double bind.

A further double bind was evident where the women were trapped between their partner’s expectations of having the right to impose on them combined with the right to blame them for the consequences. I refer to this as the ‘I will impose on you yet blame you’ double bind.

As with double standards, these double binds were highly interrelated and very difficult to tease apart. Yet, they created a further layer to the impenetrable yet elusive block to the women’s attempts for autonomy, agency or equality.

I explain the constellation of double binds in the following order and illustrate them with quotes:

1. ‘Damned if you do and damned if you don’t’
2. ‘Revolve around me but don’t depend on me’
3. ‘I will impose on you yet blame you’

‘Damned if you do and damned if you don’t’

Commonly, double binds were experienced by the participants around their gender roles and expectations of how they should behave as women. Sally and Barbara’s stories represent how contradictory expectations prevented the women in general from receiving approval and having any sense of psychological or emotional security within the relationship. Sally explains how she never knew how to be a woman that her husband could be happy with:

He thought I should be more assertive, then...he would say... forget about this assertiveness course. He would actually say...these bloody women [at work]...they’ve all done their assertiveness training...It’s over-bearing...and he would be angry about these women. He wanted a life in the country but he would also say, Sally, I really want you to be a real woman...to have a flat in town where you push a button to have it warm. I said...you know I love this lifestyle. What are you on about? He said... you can’t be a real woman out here... and he wanted a real woman. Yes, I couldn’t win and this was a real woman. Yes, that did hurt... (Sally, P1)

Barbara conveys the unbearable tension of being trapped between her husband’s contradictory expectations. Her story started with a social outing which she particularly enjoyed, but for which her husband criticised her for being too loud. She reflects:

He was trying to turn me into the doormat but in his other rational times he’d be talking about people who...women who...allowed themselves to become doormats and I used to think, you’re nuts...you’re actually trying to do that to me by all these things that you are doing...you want me to be your slave, you want me to be your doormat...you want to smash me to bits yet you are criticising other women for being that. Or on the other hand, he used to hate women who seem to have more power in a relationship too...oh my god, the man’s weak what’s wrong with him...he’s got no guts...and in all of this I am thinking who am I?...I really don’t know...these are the things you’ve always told me you liked about me...yet when I go and do it...you don’t like it and don’t want me to do it... (Barbara, P2)

‘Revolve around me but do not depend on me’

Underlying much of the women’s sense of injustice was being expected to revolve around their partners needs, rights and wants but not being able to depend on their

partners for any of their own needs, rights or wants. This created a heavier burden of responsibility for the women and a lack of rights.

Jasmine conveys how she was double-binded by her partner's expectations to be revolved around but not depended on. This is an example of where a double bind could be transient and unpredictable but reflective of the chronic underlying constellation of double binds that prevented the women's equality in the relationship:

If I went to bed during the night it was nothing for him to come home...and belt the shit out of me because I wasn't waiting up for him. But if I sat up...he'd go off his head because I was waiting for him, spying on him...so he would belt me again... (Jasmine, P2)

Hayley conveys a more entrenched double bind within the economic arrangements with her partner:

He wouldn't give me any money...but didn't want me to work...he would justify it by saying to me that a woman's place is in the home...that I am neglecting my family and my duties...I went out to work because he would never give me much money...but it was a matter of going to work, doing the work, racing home, getting the dinner ready for him and his children and our baby and going back to work. He used to work from home... (Hayley, N)

Leanne describes how her parenting had to revolve around her partner at the expense of her needs and those of their children, in order to avoid further or worse abuse that would prevent her ability to parent:

I didn't know what to do...if I intervened to try and stop him [from hitting the children] I knew he would go for me...and then he would hurt me worse in some way and I wouldn't be able to parent the children...it was impossible...I was terrified of him... (Leanne, N)

Genevieve explains how she had all the responsibility but no rights in their relationships:

I was always having to work out my schedule according to his needs...and the kids as well...everything was worked out according to his needs...this can be very subtle I realise now and you don't realise you are doing it because it just happens naturally in a way, particularly if you are avoiding conflict...even if I or even the kids had to go without, or miss something important such as afterschool activities or food or sleep or whatever...the whole family oriented

around him and his needs...I don't think he even considered what that might have cost us and how unbalanced it was... (Genevieve, N)

'I will impose on you yet blame you'

A particularly strong theme in the women's narratives was being held responsible for both the cause and the consequences of their partner's negative behaviour. They felt trapped between their partner's expectations that they had the right to impose themselves on the women in some way and then the right to blame them for their responses or reactions. The quotes in this section refer to the women's sexual and physical abuse. They also convey the way the women were trapped between their partner's expectations of being accommodated but not held accountable. These blaming double binds contaminated the entire relationship.

Alice felt trapped by the way her partner imposed his sexual expectations on her and then blamed her for the consequences:

I found out that he had dirty girlie magazines so that's why he was spending time down there, going through them...and then coming home and being angry with me...[he said] I made him do that [the magazines] because I wouldn't have sex... (Alice, P1)

Gabrielle had six young children. She was trapped between having to overcompensate for her partner's imposition of a neglectful parental and economic contribution to the relationship and then being blamed for neglecting her partner. This is also a classic example of the 'revolve around me but do not depend on me' double bind:

I got blamed for his affair because I was giving the kids too much attention...but I had to...he was doing nothing...he didn't give them attention...there was no parenting going on from him...I was earning most of the money and did all of the child-rearing...he'd want to have sex and I would be too tired...and I remember him being really grumpy and sulky about that...I wasn't fulfilling my duties... (Gabrielle, N)

The women who had never experienced physical violence all spoke of sexual abuse. Leanne's experience represents these women. Her husband monitored her sexually

but was himself promiscuous (a double standard). He double-binded her by first imposing himself on her sexually and then blaming her for the consequences:

Sex wasn't normal with him. He'd watch filthy disgusting porn videos and he would want to do similar. I'd get home and I could hardly force myself up the stairs because of the things I knew he would make me do...he'd force me into it...not physically...and I couldn't say no or he'd get me back in another way which would maybe be worse...I got herpes and he blamed me for it...(Leanne, N)

All the women who reported being physically assaulted by their partner described how they were physically imposed upon but then held responsible for the abuse:

...he had me convinced if...because along with the beatings came the, well, if you had just done what you were told, this wouldn't be happening. If you had just not done this or that, this wouldn't be happening... (Sam, P2)

I made my ex grab me by the throat and try to push me out the window... (Summer, P2)

If I hit you, you are responsible for it... (Sharni, P2)

Eight women reported being raped by their partners. Four of these women were also regularly physically assaulted, one woman experienced one incident of physical violence and three did not experience physical violence. Further examples of the blaming double bind include being held responsible by their partners for being raped:

[He said] if I rape you, it is because you know you wanted it... (Sam, P2)

He called me names and pushed aggressively for sex. If I said no, I was having an affair. Three of my kids are due to... I have got them because he raped me... (Jasmine, P2)

These three double binds silenced the women and prevented them from ever being able to hold their partner accountable, either for their behaviour or for the impact of it. Another particularly toxic effect was that the women were unable to ascertain what was necessary to gain their partner's respect. Further, the women were unable to ascertain how to prevent being assaulted or abused. Considering their partner's expectations could be arbitrary and transient, there seemed no consistent way to behave that would ensure their emotional or physical safety on any level.

Despite the fact that double standards and double binds caused the women great harm and denied them autonomy, agency and equality, these conditions were very difficult for the women to detect or articulate.

Core Behavioural Style

It was clear within the women's narratives that their partners had a particular behavioural style. Superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes created adversarial communication and behaviour patterns which affected the entire relationship. The women described a pattern of being verbally and non-verbally treated in ways which disregarded, obstructed or overpowered their rights, needs and boundaries.

This pattern was observable within the women's narratives irrespective of whether they had experienced any physical violence from their partner. It did not preclude times of fun, and expressions of love and good will from their partner. Overall, the women experienced a concerted and relentless pattern of boundary violations from their partners that prevented equality, autonomy and agency within their physical and sexual relationship, their social and economic arrangements, their communication patterns, and the way in they were publically portrayed.

Adversarial communication patterns were pivotal to all the boundary violations. For example, disregarding boundary violations included withdrawing from or refusing to communicate. Obstructing boundary violations included the use of verbal expressions of distress, self-pity, blame and the use of charm. Overpowering boundary violations included putdowns, intimidation, name calling and threats.

Boundary violations, however, also included certain behavioural acts within their physical and sexual relationship, their economic and social arrangements, and the way in which the women were publically portrayed. Irrespective of how the women tried to resist such boundary violations, their partner's adversarial attitudes ensured their defeat. Sometimes this was accomplished with retaliatory behaviour and often with the threat of it.

I explain the three types of boundary violations in the following order and illustrate them with quotes. For each type, I demonstrate how they played out within the women's physical and sexual relationship with their partners, within their social and economic arrangements, within their communication patterns and their public portrayal.

1. Boundary violations that involved disregarding communication and behaviour
2. Boundary violations that involved obstructing communication and behaviour
3. Boundary violations that involve overpowering communication and behaviour

Boundary violations that involved disregarding communication and behaviour

Backhanded ways of making you feel bad or guilty... (Karly, N)

The main theme underlying this form of boundary violation was a pattern of avoiding, omitting or being disinterested in the verbal or behavioural engagement necessary to facilitate an egalitarian relationship. The core of these boundary violations was the abandonment and neglect experienced by the women in being shut down, shut out and denied empathy. I will illustrate this core before demonstrating how this led to avoidant or neglectful verbal or non-verbal behaviour that affected the women throughout the entire relationship.

Shutting down and out

The women felt that their reality, wants and needs were regularly shut down and shut out, rather than responded to. For example, their partners would verbally deny the women's reality. This could, for example, be a denial that an incident important to the women had ever transpired. This was experienced by the majority of the women over both small and very injurious incidents. For example, Karly and Sally describe how their partner would say:

It didn't happen, Sally... (Sally, P1)

I don't know what you are talking about...I don't remember... (Karly, N)

Penny spoke of her partner's denial of his abuse of her:

Oh, I daydream. I have dreams. Visions. Yeah. He's never actually physically harmed me...it was all a figment of my imagination so yeah...I dreamt it all... (Penny, P2)

A strong theme was the experience of being shut out by their partner. They described their partner's regular use of silence, refusing to respond for extended periods, and being frozen out with 'passive hostility'. Jane, Alice, Sue, Summer and Gabrielle provide examples:

He would just come home and not talk to you and then you were trying to work out all the things that you'd done that week to see if there was something in that...that may have caused that reaction.... (Jane, N)

Whenever I tried to ask my ex, when we were together, why are you doing this, there would be no answer, no apology, no discussion, no negotiation... he would freeze me out...work late at night in his shed and not acknowledge me as being there at all at times... (Alice, P1)

He just ignored everything I said... (Sue, N)

I was so insignificant...he would treat me like I was not there... (Summer, P2)

It was like talking to a wall...he didn't hear anything I said... (Gabrielle, N)

The most distressing component of this type of boundary violation was the withholding of empathy from the women.

Withholding of empathy

He really had no care or concern for me... (Sue, N)

A prevalent cause of distress and fear in the women's narratives was their partner's lack of empathy. This included minimising and trivialising their view-point, but also extended to a chronic lack of care for the women's well-being. In particular, the women describe their partners as having no empathy for how their behaviour impacted on them. This was a critical factor, as it meant the women could not bring about change even when they could clearly articulate what their concerns were. They knew that even if they shared their fear or distress, it would have no effect on their

partner. This not only left them without any access to care and comfort when they were distressed or anxious, it created fear and vulnerability.

Wendy and Veronica spoke of their partner's lack of emotional connection and empathy. They point out the additional burden of being told it was their problem:

...It was all very nice and breezy for him...it's very much, 'I don't see what your problem is...' [His drinking]...he thought it was because I couldn't handle it.... (Wendy, N)

[He said] what's wrong with you, well it's your problem not mine...can't you have some fun? I said...I am not going to cartwheel around the house to entertain you...I am upset. You know, I need to talk about this. Yeah, no support...none whatsoever. He said, just get over it. Let go of it...and I got to the stage where I didn't expect it and I thought, I don't want to talk to you anyway... (Veronica, P2)

The women consistently spoke of a lack of reassurance from their partners around the issue of 'other women' their partner was paying attention to:

He was always having a flirtation...he went to stay with his ex-partner and he withheld...he wasn't reassuring. The implication was ...you are so insecure...that annoyed him that I was insecure... and this 'insecurity' of mine got worse and worse... (Carol, N)

When he is displeased...he is beyond reach...he withdraws and is cold and unreachable...I was so hurt and I couldn't make him understand my distress...it was so unjust...when I was at my most vulnerable he was at his most cruel...he was cruel about other women...I chopped and changed aspects of myself to stop it from happening... (Sebrina, P2)

Another aspect to the lack of empathy in the women's lives was their realisation that it meant their partners would not monitor their behaviour to prevent harm to the family. Gabrielle explains:

...he doesn't like me being stronger at all...it actually makes him angrier, really angry...his temper was so violent he would have lashed out and not thought about it and no come back...he won't care...no empathy...just you shouldn't have made me angry...(Gabrielle, N)

Karly, like all the women, considered she did not matter to her partner:

...I just said what's going on for me and how deeply it's affecting me and they didn't say, gee, I'm concerned about that because I care about you. I tried to put that to my partner over and over and it's just like... I don't even know what you're talking about. He didn't know what I meant by saying that and that to me makes common sense. When people turn and say, gee, I want to go into that with you because I'm part of the problem and I care about you enough that I want to talk about that. So, you basically just get confirmation, well, you don't really matter. What you've been thinking for a long time is right... because they don't want to, they don't care about what's going on for you... (Karly, N)

The remorse and apologies referred to in the women's narratives did not appear to extend to true empathy and therefore bring about change in the relationship. They appeared to be more an attempt to use expressions of distress to win the women back into an accommodating role.

The neglectful behaviour typical of disregarding boundary violations occurred within each of the main aspects of the relationship regularly referred to by the women. I have chosen the following examples to represent this type of boundary violation but they are by no means a comprehensive list of the possible ways to refuse the verbal and non-verbal engagement necessary to take an active part in facilitating an egalitarian relationship.

Within the physical relationship between the women and their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour which avoided responsibility to the women's and children's health, safety, and well-being:

He would never get around to fixing my car brakes, even though they were dodgy and he refused to pay to get them fixed... (Genevieve, N)

I could never get him to feed the children properly...He didn't like my eldest son to eat, as he wasn't his son...he has an eating disorder to this day... (Elle, PI)

He would drink before he knew he had to drive the children... (Wendy, N)

Within the sexual relationship between the women and their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour which withheld responsible and reciprocal behaviour:

He wasn't interested in checking if he caught anything when he had his affair so he wouldn't pass it on to me... (Genevieve, N)

He didn't really care how I found sex with him... (Virginia, N)

Within the economic arrangements between the women and their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour which avoided financial responsibility:

He didn't want me to work, wouldn't see why I wanted to...and he would only give me so much to live on... (Jodie, N)

He really hardly worked – he just played at having his own business – I earned all the money and raised the kids singlehandedly... (Gabrielle, N)

Within the social arrangements between the women and their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour which ignored or shut out the women:

He would ignore me when we were at parties together...would never sit with me... (Lola Lucia, N)

He didn't like her [a friend] to come around so when she came he would go and lock himself in the toilet and as soon as she left he would come out and give me the silent treatment... (Jane, N)

Within the communication patterns between the women and their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour which prevented appropriate engaging, negotiating, listening, provision of information, explanations or reassurance:

He would quietly walk out or turn the music up... (Veronica, P2)

He didn't want me to go out to work. He told me the kids were too young to leave. One day I went to do the shopping. We had a joint account and he was working and had a good job. I went to pay for the groceries.....there was no money...and no petrol to get back home. I confronted him with it... and he said that's the way it is going to be from now on. I said what do you mean...why...he just walked off smiling and chuckling to himself and he wouldn't give me any explanation... (Elle, P1)

Within the way in which the women were publically portrayed by their partners, disregarding boundary violations resulted in behaviour and communication which withheld information that prevented the women's accurate public portrayal:

He would do a hang-dog act with others as if I was causing him great stress – he never actually said what he was up to with me... (Virginia, N)

Disregarding boundary violations were a constant feature of the women's narratives. Avoidant and withholding communication and behaviours played an important role in the women's oppression. Although the chronic pattern of withdrawing from healthy boundaries and responsibility was often covert and less noticeable, it was no less impactful or important to the women as having their boundaries, rights or needs obstructed or overpowered.

Boundary violations that involved obstructing communication and behaviour

The women spoke of how their partner's communication and behavioural style obstructed their attempts to negotiate clear boundaries within their relationship. The women felt constantly frustrated by their partner's communication style when attempting to negotiate minor or important issues. They felt their rights and needs were also hampered, thwarted or impeded by their partner's behavioural style, and prevented their access to equal rights, autonomy or agency within the relationship.

A particularly prominent issue for all the women was how their partner successfully retained control by a constant deflection of responsibility. This was achieved with a wide range of behaviours that can be categorised as self pity and distress, victimisation, charm, blame and accusations. These deflective behaviours were guilt-inducing. The women felt double-binded by a sense of guilt for not only being the cause of their partner's anger or distress, but also for their own angry and/or distressed reactions to their partner's behaviour.

Distress and victimisation

Two times we tried mediation... he played victim and sat and cried... (Jane, N)

The women described at length being hampered in their attempts to create change in the relationship by their partner's verbal and behavioural expressions of distress and victimisation. There was a strong theme in the women's narratives of their partner's use of self-pity. They explained that this tended to occur when they challenged or confronted their partner about the negative impact of their behaviour, or when they were not adequately accommodating their partner's expectations. The women all spoke of feeling manipulated and controlled by these expressions. Given that the women experienced multiple incidents of abuse from their partners, they were angry that their partner successfully deflected attention away from this abuse and its impact and successfully redirected it towards their own distress instead. Their anger and confusion was compounded when their partner was also able to successfully redirect it towards blaming the woman as well. This extended to inaccurately representing the women publically.

Collette and Genevieve describe how their partner deflected attention away from their behaviour by using subtle expressions of distress to gain their sympathy:

He would take things the wrong way all the time...there was a soft side to him that you could tap into and feel sorry for... so he used it... (Collette, N)

I would just feel terrible that I had apparently misinterpreted him – I'd walk off feeling pathetic...he would act as if I had really deeply offended his integrity...as if he was deeply injured by my inaccurate interpretations... (Genevieve, N)

Sally felt her partner regularly obstructed her from attending outside activities because he was distressed, even though the activity was important to her:

I went to a drawing course...it was lovely...after three sessions he had back pain...he said, as I got ready to go...you're leaving me, that's how far your love goes, is it? I thought he was joking. Started like a joke but he had me in tears in seconds. I wasn't even that soft. It's just the way he could express things...he drew it out for so long it was almost too late to go and then I realised I will be late and suddenly I felt I can't go, this is no good... (Sally, P1)

Virginia found herself similarly obstructed by expressions of distress when she asked her partner to leave:

Well, he acted really ill and dragged himself around...he asked in a distressed state if he could maybe sleep in the garage, knowing full well I could never bear him doing that...the garage was awful...(Virginia, N)

Jessica and Penny provide examples of their partner's more dramatic expressions of distress. Both women experienced regular abuse and violence in the relationship but were successfully obstructed with these expressions when they wanted to leave or challenge their partner's behaviour:

Then it would go to [he would say]...well, I am going to kill myself...he's still to this day got huge slash marks up his arms from now what I now know to be emotional blackmail...I just thought if he does something... how am I doing to live with myself...you know he is the father of my children... (Jessica, P2)

...his best effort at trying to make me cave in and love him was to take an overdose of insulin one night and lie down on the couch and wait for the coma to kill him... (Penny, P2)

Barbara experienced severe and regular physical violence. Her partner also expected her to pay all their bills out of her wage. She outlines how expressions of distress were used by her partner to avoid equality in their economic arrangements:

He used self-pity to make our son feel bad for him being so poor. He [son] would come to me sometimes and say... Oh, dad is really poor. 'Oh son, I have been hearing that all of my married life. About how poor he is... (Barbara, P2)

An additional obstruction significant to the women was their partner's sense of being victimised. This deflected responsibility for their behaviour and denied the women any accountability. Emanon explains how her partner deflected the responsibility for lying in this way:

He spent all his time with me lying about so many things...when I eventually found out, he admitted to lying and said, but I have had such a rotten life and I had to cover it up... (Emanon, P2)

The women described how their partner's feelings of distress and victimisation held great significance in their relationship. Their partner used and expressed these feeling

to deflect responsibility away from themselves and it encouraged the women to feel responsible and to look responsible in the eyes of others. Expressions of victimisation included implications or accusations that the women had actually wronged their partners and caused them distress. The women described how they felt manipulated into adjusting to and accommodating their partners because they were disconcerted at their partner's distress and concerned as to whether and how they had contributed towards it.

Genevieve gives an example from her relationship. Her partner initially tried to cover up his overspending until she confronted him with the evidence:

He just sobbed and sobbed and said I was just so lonely after you had the baby...and I needed something for myself...to help me get through all your problems with the baby... (Genevieve, N)

Sally explains how expressions of distress and victimisation were used to gain the sympathy of others:

He breaks down and cries in front of the children and gets them on side... 'I love your mum but I just can't handle how she screams at me', which is not true but it got their sympathy... (Sally, P1)

As opposed to having their concerns respectfully addressed, the women felt a lack of emotional connection, caring and interest from their partners. In addition to the use of distress and being victimized, the use of charm obstructed the negotiation of a more egalitarian relationship.

Charm

With his charisma and charm you couldn't pick it up... (Veronica, P2)

Charm was strongly related to expressions of distress. The women described how they could be charmed by their partner into accommodating and accepting behaviour which had negatively impacted upon them. A thread woven through all the women's narratives was being thrown off balance and obstructed from achieving what was

important to them by their partner's capacity for charm. This often led to a hope for a better relationship. Collette and Summer explain:

*He had this kind of winning approach...it made you think that perhaps he was a sweet person underneath...he was a little too persuasive or something...
(Collette, N)*

*He sort of tilts his head to the side and he acts like the most pathetic little boy you have ever come across and he begged me not to leave...I'll promise I will try so hard...you think maybe there is hope...you really think he means it...
(Summer, P2)*

The women also spoke of their partner's capacity to charm other people as well which made their own distress at their partner's treatment of them less plausible:

*No, they don't believe me, though. They see this nice charming man, like all the rest of them, and they think I am just a bitch. They think I am making it all up
(Summer, P2)*

*He was very charismatic...everybody loved him and couldn't see my problem...
(Sally, P1)*

Out in public, he was the best parent, he did everything for the kids...in public...but in private...he just switched off... (Gabrielle, N)

Ah... my ex can talk the pants off a nun...he's really nice when he wants to be nice. When my boyfriend went down to introduce himself he actually came back and honestly didn't realise he's just a dickhead because my ex was so nice...but half an hour later I got the phone call from my ex...don't you send him around here... (Caroline, N)

Distress and charm were interwoven with a blaming stance towards the women.

Blame and accusations

He would say...it's all your fault, [Virginia] ... (Virginia, N)

Blame was a consistent and prevalent theme in the narratives. The women reported being directly held responsible and accountable for any problems in their relationship. The experience of being verbally and non-verbally related to from a blaming and fault-finding stance occurred for every woman. Lola, Jane, Wendy convey how generalised this was in the women's relationships:

I found that living with that sort of personality...it will become all my fault... (Lola Lucia, N)

In this relationship...I've always been the one at fault... (Jane, N)

So I was wrong no matter what... I was in the wrong... (Wendy, N)

Barbara conveys the constant tension of this one-way focus on the women:

I was such a bad person... even family outings...it was always unease because if something was forgotten it was always my fault...or of the kids got grisly...see the bloody kids can't behave themselves. Look, see, if you were a good mother this wouldn't have happened... (Barbara, P2)

Hayley alludes to the derogatory and hostile nature of the chronically blaming stance:

He tried to make out it was us who were false and twisted... (Hayley, N)

Within any interactions, the women recounted how their partner successfully deflected responsibility, refused accountability and retained control over them in this way. The use of direct blame and accusations added weight to the generalised blaming stance. Blame and accusations were typically used to counter and deflect the women's attempts to bring something to their partner's attention. Karly speaks of her experiences, which were common to every participant:

The thing with that dying thing, you feel like you're fading away. You even know you can't talk to them about that. I can remember, I still know I couldn't say it. If I said that when I was in that relationship...this is what was happening for me, I'd be, hah, you know, fobbed off. Don't be so dramatic, you're being stupid or whatever. What a stupid thing to say, or something like that. You'd be accused of being dramatic or over the top...What about you, you do this...what about when you...he would never answer me without accusing me (Karly, N)

Wendy explains how deflecting responsibility by blame or accusations affected their economic arrangements as a couple:

I don't know where the money went...the big money that we earned... we never came back ahead...he was drinking it and spending it on toys. He was really into bushwalking...he spent thousands and thousands on bushwalking gear... but (apparently) I spent it on patch-working fabric... (Wendy, N)

A recurrent theme also portrayed by all the women was being blamed for the symptoms of physical and mental stress, distress or anger that they felt they had in reaction to their partner's behaviour. Amy explains the subtle use of this in her relationship, whereas Sally conveys being directly blamed for her reaction to her husband's chronic refusal to engage with her:

I was told I should be so grateful for the things he does, most dads wouldn't participate as much as I do... and I think, yeah, I am really lucky he helps so much. He does cook meals, he does bath the child. You know, he does do things, I am really lucky. Things are good here, why am I not ok...there's something wrong with me... (Amy, N)

...I wanted to work out our conflicts and said, look, we have to talk about this...he would say, not while you are in such a state, but I wasn't in any state....one day I got as far as saying, how can I talk to you? How would you listen to me? I was in tears...I was led to believe, see, that's you. You are doing this to yourself...he would say... it's just you, Sally... (Sally, P1)

Underlying the relentless deflection of responsibility and a blaming stance are the constellation of double standards and double binds. The impenetrable matrix of double standards that deprived the women of any equality was further reinforced by the double bind of being blamed for not only being the cause of having their boundaries violated but also for their responses to these violations. This added weight to the intensity and complexity of the pattern of boundary violations within which the women lived.

The following set of quotes convey how the women's boundaries could be obstructed or thwarted in their physical and sexual relationship with their partner, their economic and social arrangements, their communication patterns and within their public portrayal:

Physical Relationship: He would always find some way to disrupt my attempts to exercise, eat healthily or get enough sleep. He was very happy to interrupt my sleep or see me go without, but not for himself. It was like he just didn't want to see me flourish... (Virginia, N)

Sexual Relationship: If I didn't want sex, he did. If I did, he didn't. If I wanted a hug, he wouldn't. If he knew I liked something, he wouldn't do it...it was like I

didn't dare let on what I wanted because he would seem to want to frustrate or deny me... (Genevieve, N)

Economic Relationship: When I confronted him about the money he had spent he denied it and then said that he needed something to make him feel better because I was going through post-natal depression...and it was money he put into the mortgage anyway (Amy, N)

Social Relationship: I wanted to go back to school and finish year 12...because it meant I would not be home for three days a week. He just put things in place so that I couldn't make it...there was always something we had to do...always something that got in the way to get my license...if I wanted to go somewhere he'd have to take me (Emanon, P2)

Communication Patterns: 'It was a point scoring thing for him... (Jane, N)

Public Portrayal: The children eventually asked why [we had separated] and he said...oh, your mother know – she knows what she has done... (Karly, N)

In the following section, the focus is on a more obvious layer of the pattern of boundary violations. The women described how their partner also successfully retained control throughout the relationship with a chronic pattern of overpowering the women's boundaries.

Boundary violations that involved overpowering communication and behaviour

The women's narratives reflect how they were compelled by verbal and non-verbal threats and intimidation to submit to their partner's demands. This boundary violation was characterised by behaviour which overrode, invaded or engulfed the women's boundaries. Their partner ensured that they would get their own way in every aspect of the relationship. They insisted on being obeyed or accommodated through the use of verbal and physical intimidation, indirect and direct threats, and further achieved their own way with deception, deprivation, restriction or force.

Every woman in this study experienced a pattern of these behaviours. This included physical violence for 14 of the women. Four of these women also reported rape.

However, there were another three women who reported rape who were in the sample of women who did not report any physical violence. It was only in the experience of such direct force that the women had more divergent experiences. The women's experiences of overpowering boundary violations within their communication patterns have been included within the other aspects of the relationship, as these were a pivotal way in which the women were denied equality, autonomy or agency when they were attempting to negotiate issues within any aspect of their relationship.

The physical relationship

I really did believe he would kill me and the kids... (Lola Lucia, N)

The physical relationship in the women's narratives was inclusive of more than physical violence. Their narratives conveyed the importance to them of how their partners treated their physical needs for safety, autonomy, health and wellbeing. There was a pattern within all the narratives of these needs being threatened, which for fourteen women included physical violence.

Sam, Summer, Sebrina and Jane explain how their partners affected their physical needs for safety and well-being:

I wasn't allowed to put on weight when I was pregnant... (Sam, P2)

...he just treated her like she was a bit of dirt. And he stood over the top of her one night and he said why should I feed her, and he kicked her out. He said I want her out of this house, like this, and she is six... (Summer, P2)

He lost his license for drink driving...got caught driving without his license and driving the children around at the time...I couldn't depend on him to look after our well-being...he didn't care about our well-being...(Sebrina, P2)

After my eldest was born I had to go back to work and that was really difficult... 'cause he wanted me to go back to work...I had to wean her so I could put her in care... (Jane, N)

The women spoke frequently of being frightened by their partner's tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and behaviours. Karly, Summer and Sebrina describe being intimidated by their partner's facial expression and tone of voice:

I think he...ah...probably didn't like me to challenge him. You know...looks [embarrassed laugh], snarls, and tones of voices. I know that was all there and those things I can remember. I used to hate the feeling they would create in me...fear, rejection... (Karly, N)

It is the scariest look you have ever come across. It is like his whole face is twisted...and it is like, I am going to murder you...you are going to die... (Summer, P2)

He would stand over me, yell and point at me...stab at me with his finger...he did it all the time...the lengths he would go to bully me... (Sebrina, P2)

Sue spoke of being called names when she articulated needs:

He called me a lazy bitch for wanting help with the ironing... (Sue, N)

Jane, Lola, Jodie and Jessica convey having their sense of safety threatened by their partner's non-verbal threats and treatment of property and pets:

He was terrible in the court room. He pointed his fingers to me cocked like a gun and when he pulled up beside me on the motorbike once he did the slit across his throat... (Jane, N)

Here he was with a woman who wasn't his mother and he couldn't always get what he wanted so he'd throw the biggest boy tantrum...punch a hole in the wall...smashed the glass coffee table...oh god...he just shot the puppy because it was crying... (Lola Lucia, N)

He would punch holes in the cupboards...when he was annoyed... (Jodie, N)

He attacked the animals – one neighbour asked him to stop making this dog scream or she'll call the RSPCA and he said go inside or it will be you next... (Jessica, P2)

The experience of subtle but hostile verbal threats was also significant. Common to all of the women was the experience of ominous, unnerving statements or acts that would veil a physical threat towards the women's and children's safety. Sally, Jane and Sam give examples of such threats:

Yeah and we had been briefly separated... I had to move out of the house which was actually up the road...but I never knew if he was going to come and kill me because there was a rifle in our house and he was so weird with his ominous remarks. What sent me packing at that time was him watching TV with my youngest...I could hear there was a criminal movie on and the husband had

murdered the wife...and I heard my husband say to my son, see that's how it can go too, and just the way he said that... (Sally, P1)

He bought up something about a gun license and said he'd had a conversation with someone who said that would be a really stupid thing to do and I thought, he is threatening me...the possible threat is just sitting there you know, behave or [else]...I said what, are you considering taking me out...and then he'll go on to something completely different...oh yeah, they're only just little threats, they're subtle enough that people around probably wouldn't pick up on them but they're there...look out...one day... (Jane, N)

When I was pregnant my partner told me he had kidnapped his son from his first marriage because she was an unfit mother. That was his way of saying...you leave, I'll still be there. It scared me...He would remind me of, you know, 'the people I know...they don't mind killing people, they actually enjoy it... (Sam, P2)

All the women described the overt hostility of direct verbal threats made by their partner within their relationship. This was particularly the case when they tried to stand up to or leave their partner. The use of overt threats left the women with little doubt that their partner would go to any length, including putting them at physical risk.

Barbara, Jessica and Sam were threatened with physical violence to prevent them from leaving:

If I had left he kept telling me that he would disarm the brakes or he would make sure that I would be hurt. He would come after me...and I even considered going to the mainland thinking that would be the answer, but I thought...no...they are so hell-bent on harming you that he would have just found us...he actually mentioned he would kill me (Barbara, P2)

He threatened to throw me down a mine shaft...he dragged me into the car and took me to ... where the mine was...He tried to kill me multiple times. He said if I can't have you nobody will have you... (Jessica, P2)

If you walk out that door, I will have you fucking killed or I will kill you myself... (Sam, P2)

Sally and Summer spoke of being intimidated by their partner's threats around the children, should they have left:

He said, and get it into your head if you left I would follow you to the ends of the world. I'd find you. He's my son. My son... (Sally, P1)

If you ever leave me again, neither of us is going to get the children...I am going to take the children off you because you are an unfit mother... (Summer, P2)

Sharni was threatened with physical violence when she asked her partner to leave:

I asked him to leave... He threatened to kill all of us and set the house on fire. I was very scared... (Sharni, P2)

Jasmine, Jessica and Sebrina describe physical violence whilst pregnant:

...he would belt me when I had the babies in my arms...I lost a twin when I was about three months pregnant because of a beating... (Jasmine, P2).

...how my first two babies survived I'll never know because he used to kick me in the stomach... (Jessica, P2)

I was pregnant...he chased me to get a letter out of my hand...he threw me down and sat on me. I miscarried... (Sebrina, P2)

The use of physical violence was not necessarily the outcome of a buildup of tension, or angry altercations between the couple but was often described as random or premeditated acts that took the women by surprise. Jasmine and Barbara spoke of how the use of abuse or violence seemed to have a life of its own:

You know, he would start but he never ever started on me when I was standing there face to face. He always took me on, had a go, when I was, you know, in bed asleep or when I had one of the kids in my hands or when I was busy doing something and wasn't actually directly looking at him... (Jasmine, P2)

I would have a blanket or a pillow in the boot of the car...and if I could tell it was going to be a bad night...I would just keep my keys on me...he would just change to a madman and he became so irrational...I would leave the house, get in the car and go...he found me one night...it was like his occupation... (Barbara, P2)

Jessica and Emanon describe some of the physical violence they experienced that was witnessed by the children:

...and he was choking me and I felt my eyes start to pop out of my head. I wasn't far from being unconscious...on many occasions I felt this asphyxiation... (Jessica, P2)

My child had witnessed him strangling me. He put a belt around my throat once, one of those elastic belts, and he panicked when it got stuck, like he put it around and over the top of the wardrobe and locked the door and I couldn't get it off...I passed out and turned blue and my child saw him with a knife at my throat cutting the belt away... (Emanon, P2)

Overall, the women's narratives reflected how their partner's core attitudinal and behavioural style resulted in the disregard; obstruction or overpowering of the women's physical needs for safety, autonomy and well-being.

The sexual relationship

Each narrative conveyed the importance to the women of how their partner treated them sexually. This included their needs for respect, intimacy and reciprocity. Sexually demeaning attitudes, words and behaviours which overpowered their sexual rights, needs and boundaries were reported by all the women. For eight of the women (Genevieve, Virginia, Leanne, Elle, Jessica, Sharni, Jasmine and Sam) this included the experience of rape. Of these eight women, Genevieve, Virginia and Leanne did not report any physical violence from their partner and Elle reported one incident of physical violence. All of them reported high levels of control or negligence towards their physical safety, autonomy and well-being.

The majority of the women reported feeling sexually insulted and coerced:

My ex was coercive and grumpy around sex...if he didn't get it, I was called names like frigid bitch, frigid mole. He was critical and unpleasant about my body...I was given the attitude big time, [he would say] ...fuck, this is not the life I wanted... (Lola Lucia, N)

Being told I was having affairs and having to stand up for myself for so long, I got worn down. I never had an affair...he used to follow me, thinking that's what I was doing and he was hell-bent on it...he was psychotic... (Sharni, P2)

Every woman felt further insulted by their partner's use of sexually derogatory names or attitudes. For some of the women, this was in front of the children:

He was verbally abusive...he was into name-calling, insulting and criticising...You are nothing but a fucking slut and a bitch... (Alice, P1)

If ever I tried to make a point or raise an issue, he would say, I just need a good fuck... or a service (Hayley, N)

He called me names...he is, I think, a woman hater...he was always referring to women at work as the stupid bitches at work...it was awful... (Elle, P1)

Look at your fucking slut of a mother. Don't you grow up like that fucking slut, will you...No matter what I did, he put it down (Summer, P2)

The majority of the women, with the exception of Carol, Karly, Cassandra, Caroline, Jane, Sally, Wendy and Anita, described being overwhelmed by their partner's actual sexual demands:

He wanted me to strip and made me buy the gear....that was seedy stuff... (Barbara, P2)

...he is some kind of sex addict...he is quite perverted in a way...I didn't want my children to be around most of the women he had...they were horrible...he had several affairs...he couldn't have cared less re sexually transmitted diseases and me with his affairs...he head-butted me...and I felt I had pushed him because of my accusations re his affairs...which he was having... (Sebrina, P2)

He held me down and raped me on my wedding night...and he said, 'You slut, you owe it to me and I am going to fuck you', and he tore me clothes off and I didn't want to do it... (Sharni, P2)

...well, it depends on what you call rape...yes, I was forced to have sex...it can be done physically and sort of mentally...it makes me feel sick to the stomach to think about it...it can be twisted into something that is even worse than rape...like a sexual torture... (Virginia, N)

However, other women felt sexually neglected and abandoned:

He would refuse to even sleep with me... (Carol, N)

He stopped wanting to make love... (Jodie, N)

When Gabrielle resisted sexual advances because of the fatigue from having to overcompensate for her partner's lack of financial, physical and emotional contribution to the family she was told:

You should be grateful I still find you attractive... (Gabrielle, N)

The women's narratives conveyed how their partner's pattern of boundary violations, double standards and double binds resulted in an overall loss of sexual intimacy and reciprocity.

Economic arrangements

The women's needs for economic security and independence were overpowered by their partner's behaviour. The experience of economic equality was not reported by any of the women. They felt deprived of this, and their narratives pointed to a number of behaviours which overpowered their ability to achieve it within their relationship. For example, Summer, Jessica and Sue spoke of how their partner controlled all the money and assets:

Everything was his... in his name... (Summer, P2)

He would walk me to the bank, make me get my pension out and take my pension (Jessica, P2)

I had to use my wage once I started working to pay for everything and he paid for the mortgage. Although it came out in the end...he wasn't doing that properly either... (Sue, N)

...he always had control of the money...I wasn't allowed... (Emanon, P2)

Elle, Amy and Barbara describe how the women were invariably deprived of economic resources by their partners, particularly if they were not able to work:

I never had access to bank accounts... (Jane, N)

All I got was once a fortnight a packet of smokes. I couldn't even get a pad or anything. He set the shopping. He said 'I'll buy what I think we should have and that's all I'm buying.' I was a kept woman...like a third world woman... (Elle, P1)

He would not give me money to buy food and nappies with, there was no joint account and I was not allowed to use his credit card or I would be blamed for having too much on credit... (Amy, N)

...financial abuse...well, that was just added to the emotional abuse because that...well, you are not worth it...even though it was the kid's food, it's food, my food...he was not thinking about us... (Barbara, P2)

Each woman experienced either being stolen from, lied to, having assets hidden from them, or fraudulent behaviour by their partners:

...the money he has cost us in bad behaviour...he wrote off two cars...his affairs were expensive...my mother has spend thousands to help keep me on my feet because of the debt he has put me in... (Sebrina, P2)

He took all the doonas off the kids' beds when he went. He also left me in \$10,000 debt by taking out accounts in both our names. It took me three years to pay it off because he refused and I wanted to clear my name legally... (Jasmine, P2)

He stopped me from getting a copy of the mortgage repayments and spent over \$10,000 on the internet...He would nick money out of my wallet and tell me I had lost it...finances say to me a lot about security because I am really careful. And if he was willing to jeopardise our little family unit security to the point where we could end up homeless...have no food to eat...he didn't give a fuck about us... (Amy, N)

Centrelink put an exemption on me collecting maintenance from him because it was too dangerous. They will pursue him for fraud if he continues to harass me re signing forms to say we have 50/50 shared care... (Jane, N)

A common experience was being threatened economically to prevent the women from leaving. Penny describes how her partner did this:

[He said] I work, you don't. It's my money. Give me back the bankcard. See how you live now, you silly cow...I earn the money, so see how far you get in life without me... (Penny, P2)

Jessica describes an economic double bind in the way she was treated by her partner within their economic arrangements and then blamed for the consequences:

He took my money and then targeted me as a bad budgeter when I didn't have enough to raise the children... (Jessica, P2)

The women's experience of boundary violations, double standards and double binds within their economic arrangements resulted in an overall loss of economic security and independence.

Social arrangements

The way in which their partners treated their needs and rights to a social network and resources was a major point of concern. This included how their partners treated them when out in public. The women all reported overpowering boundary violations within their social arrangements.

Lola, Hayley and Summer convey the variety of ways in which they felt overpowered in any social situations by their partner's putdowns with hostile and mocking undertones:

Socially, if we went to a barbecue together he wouldn't sit with me, and he would put me down...anything to make me feel bad. I didn't drink because if I did I felt like I couldn't defend myself against him... (Lola Lucia, N)

You are an example of a little bit of knowledge is harmful. Things like that he would say...in front of people... when we were out to dinner... (Hayley, N)

No, he hated it if I could do anything. You know, I could not, he hated it, if someone said oh, you are good at painting or whatever he would laugh (Summer, P2)

Caroline spoke of being verbally abused in front of the neighbours:

He'd just stand in the street and just yell abuse until...I perhaps wouldn't come outside...until one of the neighbours would come out and say...get going or I'll call the cops...(Caroline, N)

Many of the women, with the exception of Cassandra, Caroline, Wendy, Karly and Emanon, mentioned that they had been affected in social situations by the timing of their partner's verbal intimidation. Sally and Veronica explain:

He knew which way, which kind of remarks would probably get a certain effect...I know now, only now, that, yeah, that is the word. Wind me up and it was just like he... he found something to provoke. You know all these unresolved things...he could bring it up the moment before we [arrived] at the house of somebody... I mean he knew...he knew my reactions. That too took years... he knew with every remark...when somebody visited and I wasn't in tears but one could see I had cried, they would say, what's the matter and he'd say, oh, Sally's not so well today and then of course that was true but I couldn't explain what just went on... (Sally, P1)

Whenever we went anywhere, because he was always drunk even before we left home...he would get really abusive and really put me down and looking back on it now...it was him empowering himself and to make sure I didn't have a good time... (Veronica, P2)

All of the women made regular referrals to monitoring or withholding of resources with which they needed to work or socialise. Jasmine, Jodie and Barbara describe how this isolated them:

He used to go away for three or four days on drinking binges and come home and beat the living shit out of me. For those three or four days that he was away everything was great. You know, everything was good but I had no car, I had no phone, I had no money. So I was stuck everywhere and we always lived isolated....I was not allowed anywhere without him attending me....I had absolutely no one (Jasmine, P2)

He would only give me a certain amount to live, out of that I had to make everything work. We lived in places where I would be stuck, without transport... his social life was fine but I got used to living a certain way and was putting all into my children...with no money how was I going to get out and meet people... (Jodie, N)

....it wouldn't be unusual for him to go off and 'accidentally' pick up my car keys so I couldn't go anywhere for the day...stuck down at (suburb) and in those days we only had a little shop and that would have taken me a good three quarters of an hour to walk to with the two kids... (Barbara, P2)

Sam conveys her partner's refusal to allow her access to friends or family:

Yep, because they isolate you...you have no-one, you have nowhere to go, you don't speak to people. My Nan was really, really sick, um, dying, and it was her birthday, I was allowed to go to her party for one hour.... You have no-one, you have nothing... you don't have friends because you are not allowed to keep in contact with them. You are not allowed to talk to them, meet them, nothing... (Sam, P2)

Overall, each woman conveyed a loss of social resources and capital because of their ex-partner's pattern of boundary violations.

Public portrayal

A very strong theme within each woman's narrative was the way in which they were represented by their partners to their children, friends and family, and to the public.

A prevalent experience was having their needs for accurate representation overpowered by defamation. This was frequently in the form of false or misleading accusations and allegations. Despite the behaviour the women had been subjected to by their partner, all 30 women were publically defamed by their partner with varying degrees of success. The women spoke of being labelled to others as either mental (14), psycho (5), madwoman (7), neurotic (12), crazy (20), slut (15), unfit mother (9), insane (5), or emotionally unstable (26).

Seven of the women (Amy, Hayley, Alice, Summer, Penny, Sam and Sebrina) believed that the way that their partners represented their first wives as mentally unwell was defamatory in light of their own experience with their partner. For example, Hayley's children were four and six years old when they were kidnapped by her partner. They were only returned three months later when she agreed to her partner's request to sign away her rights to their property and assets. She had always been told he had taken the children from his first wife because she was mentally ill and therefore unfit to be a mother:

He had told me the story about how he had taken his children from the ex because she was mentally ill. Before I met her I thought, whoa, she sounds terrible. Well, she, poor old wife number one, she collapsed, she ended up in the psychiatric hospital...she told me her story ...it was so similar to mine. It was like, he did this... he did that... he said that...he said this...that's what he did to me... when she told me how he ran off with the children and how she collapsed and ended up in the psychiatric hospital...whereas I haven't. I have gone close but not quite that far... all the time I had the knowledge that this had happened to her...but she never got her children back. You know, and I remember when talking to her, she started getting all shaky and nervous and I could see that it was still, you know, like her children were just gone. Taken from her... (Hayley, N)

Sally explains how her husband's blaming and defaming of her, both to her face and publically, created a double bind where she could not win:

My friends and neighbours all thought he was wonderful. My husband went everywhere to offer help, he was very charismatic. He told me I look unfriendly and he told everyone I was the problem. They treated me warily and he'd say it was my fault for looking so unfriendly. But all along he was running me down to others in my community. He would tell our neighbours...she is not well... (Sally, P1)

Defamation, whether subtle or overt, could sabotage the way women were viewed by other people. This included psychologists, counselors and colleagues. Carol, for example, was held responsible for the difficulties within the relationship because of her partner's defamation of her character:

We went to three counsellors, it was a disaster...not because of the counsellors but because of my partner. He would take over the whole session and make it look as if nothing was wrong... he had his life sorted out and I was the needy, insecure one with the problem and I just had to find an activity I enjoyed doing... (Carol, N)

Being defamed to others resulted in a loss of social validation and support for all the women.

For the women in this study, physical violence was one possible outcome, symptom or experience of a relentless pattern of boundary violations. It was the most noticeable and sometimes most dangerous symptom of the dynamics perpetuated by their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style, but not a reliable indicator of the dynamics common to all the women's relationships which denied them equality, autonomy and agency.

The following figure gives a visual representation of the data presented in this chapter. Central to the women's experience of their partner was a superior, entitled and adversarial attitudinal style. This created an impenetrable matrix of double standards and double binds that oppressed the women in every aspect of the relationship and was reinforced by their partner's lack of empathy. A further consequence of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes was a particular behavioural style that consistently disregarded, obstructed or overpowered the women's rights, needs and boundaries. The women thus experienced a chronic and relentless pattern of boundary violations, which further prevented their equality, autonomy or agency throughout the entire relationship. Although the women resisted their partners in many ways, the web of abuse woven by their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style consistently trapped them into an accommodating and subjugated

role. The dotted lines are used to delineate the different aspects of the relationship within which the attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners emerged.

Figure 1: A Web of Abuse I



Concluding Comments to the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight how the core attitudes and behaviours experienced by each woman resulted in shared experiences of oppression throughout the entire relationship. This chapter drew attention to a web of abuse woven around the women by the attitudes and behaviours of their partners. This created double binds, double standards and a particular behavioural style which, despite the strength and ability of the women to resist, inevitably denied the women equality, autonomy and agency with their partner. The women experienced a range of boundary violations within their physical and sexual relationship with their partner, within their social and economic arrangements, and in their communication patterns and public portrayal. This was a crucial aspect of the dynamics of all the women's relationships, particularly with reference to how they re-emerged in the post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

The data presented in this chapter conveys how the women clearly challenged and resisted such an attitudinal and behavioural style, and gives evidence of how they could be sporadically successful in establishing some healthy boundaries. However, the purpose of this chapter was to illuminate how the web of abuse inevitably continued to ensure the women's overall defeat despite their attempts for equality, autonomy or agency and resulted in shared experiences of oppression.

The next chapter focuses on the impact of the web of abuse on the women in this study. The different ways in which the women were impacted on became an integral part of the dynamics of their relationships. They need to be understood as part of the context and history from which the women had to facilitate post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

Chapter Five: The Impact of the Web of Abuse

Introduction

Any damage he did to me is not seen by the world... (Lola Lucia, N)

This chapter, the second data chapter, reports on how the women described the effects of the web of abuse woven by their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style. The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it highlights the similarity in the way the women described the effects, or how their relationship impacted on them, irrespective of whether their experiences had included physical violence. Second, it draws attention to the connections between the impact on the women and the attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners described in Chapter Four. Third, this chapter, along with Chapter Four, creates the context for drawing links between the web of abuse and the women's experiences of shared parenting arrangements.

A crucial factor of the web of abuse was that the dynamics described in Chapter Four did not appear to emerge until important milestones had been reached in the relationship. At this stage, the women described significant changes within their partners. Apart from Cassandra and Caroline, whose relationships actually ended at this point, the women's narratives then began to convey the impact of their partner's emerging attitudinal and behavioural style. I have included the women's early experiences of their relationship within this chapter as this material provides important context for understanding the pivotal role that confusion played in the way the web of abuse impacted on the women.

The women also experienced fear, a loss of confidence, an erosion of their sense of self, and a loss of emotional, mental and physical well-being. These effects assumed particular significance in the negotiation and facilitation of shared parenting arrangements with their ex-partner. In these processes, the effects on the women were often exacerbated by a lack of social and legal clarity about the nature and the extent of the dynamics of their relationships.

Although I will describe the effects in a linear fashion, they were not experienced sequentially by the women but more as an intricately interwoven pattern of responses. A pictorial representation of the findings is presented at the end of the chapter.

The beginning of the relationship

I was caught in a bind I had no idea how to get out of... (Jessica, P2)

A regular theme for the majority of the women was that while in the earlier stages of the relationship they did not recognise the potential of their partners to use abuse or violence. This was irrespective of the women's family of origin, their initial level of self-esteem or their prior knowledge of abuse.

Four of the women who experienced frequent and severe physical violence from their partner identified as being abused as children and from violent backgrounds. For various reasons, which included a lack of adequate role modelling and knowledge as well as drug use, these women describe being unable to discern or protect themselves from a potentially abusive relationship:

I think I grew up passive. I think I was passive, like my Mum...and I was submissive...I for some reason took on a mentality that men...I didn't know it then but I sort of realised years later I almost looked at them like gods, like they were higher than me...and I was just this little pissy woman with a barter card... (Jessica, P2)

He used to call, if I remember back, at weird hours and drop fish off and wouldn't stop ringing me and I just thought that was love, you know, like, isn't he a lovely man and um...I didn't know it was abuse at the time..." (Sharni, P2)

The signs I should have realised...he was mental...every time I went down there I would leave in a huff but that huff would be my problem...he had this really nice house down there...I thought, god...this is probably my only chance of ever, you know, having a husband and family, so I just grabbed anything I could and he was really good looking... I should have quit then... I should have realised...he is not talking right...but he wanted me to move in... (Summer, P2)

Before I got married, when I was young, I had a drug problem and I did stupid things...I had a past...the way we were conditioned when we were growing up, men have always been the dominant one of the household, it's the man's castle...behind every great man there is a woman...women have always been

*put in second place...I always used to think that was true but not anymore...
(Emanon, P2)*

Sam, Barbara, Jasmine and Sebrina were brought up in supportive, non-violent environments. They felt they had had good self-esteem and could be discerning, yet had partners who used extensive physical violence:

You read people according to your own values...what I had in my childhood I wanted for my children. I was trying to get it from the wrong man...I thought surely this man would see...he was initially so lovely, affectionate, spontaneous, warm and loving... (Sebrina, P2)

All my friends that knew me before were like...how the hell did this happen to you...you don't put up with this shit from no-one. How? But by the time I had woken up and smelled the coffee it was way too late...and I have gone, shit, what have I done? (Sam, P2)

Penny, however, felt she had met her partner too young:

I was just becoming an individual. I'd been at home with mum and dad til I was 18 and then lived with my cousin...and she was a dominating person too...so he was another dominating influence in my life and I hadn't actually evolved fully as a person when I met him...in hindsight he was very possessive, very jealous but he was in love with me so it didn't matter...it was just subtle for a while until I asked him to marry me... and we had the children...and that's where it fell to bits... (Penny, P2)

The majority of women who did not experience physical violence in their relationship had felt they were discerning in their choice of a partner. Whereas they had clearly understood physical abuse as unacceptable, they had not understood emotional or psychological abuse and its ramifications in a relationship. Amy, Leanne and Carol explain:

I sussed out his values but they were fakes, he was performing...or maybe he thought he was being real at the time but it wasn't congruent with what he did. And they would chop and change...I thought if you had values, you wouldn't chop and change them on a whim...I had always had that in my mind...you hit me and it is all over. It is all over. It is finished. That is the bottom line. I didn't know about this other stuff... (Amy, N)

I understood physical violence...I told him that if he hit me once he had better make it a good one because it would be the only one he would get...he just laughed it off but he never did hit me... (Leanne, N)

In [country of origin] I was really strong...I got married [over here] and I didn't understand emotional abuse... (Carol, N)

Most of the women, with the exception of Collette, Caroline and Cassandra, believed they had chosen their partners well and described their partners in glowing terms:

He was very kind...he was beautiful and patient...I first noticed his temper a year after we were together... (Gabrielle, N)

He was the love of my life... (Sue, N)

He was sugar sweet, you know, my saviour. He made me feel good about myself at first...he was a charmer... (Emanon, P2)

The stupid thing is...like he was so nice to start off with...we were mates and I never saw him be, you know, horrible to anyone...I thought I had chosen really well. Even the best part of my family to start off with thought I had, from all accounts, from what I have heard since... (Jasmine, P2)

There wasn't a more sincere, honest, nice person on the earth and now this... I see a whole different person... (Anita, P1)

Collette, Cassandra and Caroline described their early experiences of their partners in less than glowing terms:

On our first date he had his hand in my knickers...sex education, we didn't get any...I think he abused me...he should have had more respect for me...I was lonely and homesick and he just kept coming around ...and I very early on felt sorry for him... (Collette, N)

He was fairly good...in hindsight I think he is a psychopath...when they are nice...the times we had broken up previous to the final separation was basically around his pot... (Caroline, N)

He was good in a way...it was good fun, he was very attentive but hard to pin down...always late...just annoying... (Cassandra, N)

However, when important milestones were reached in the relationship, the women were disconcerted by the changes they observed in their partners.

Confusion

I couldn't see the tunnel...let alone the light... (Leanne, N)

A prominent and pivotal impact of the web of abuse was confusion. The women expressed high levels of confusion once their relationship reached important relationship milestones. These were the times which required a significant increase in commitment and collaboration. For 10 of the women, this was after moving in together, or being married:

I probably knew on the [wedding] day that something was not right but I couldn't put my finger on it at that point...I guess it was because there were certain things that had to be done, requirements, and he was never there. You know when you needed him to be there for something, he just wasn't there and you couldn't get...to the truth... (Jane, N)

Very early to start with, I thought that's a bit different...some behaviour or something he might have said...but it wasn't over the top, wasn't enough to ring an alarm bell...until he moved in and everything he pretended to be...to the children as well as me...wasn't real... (Lola Lucia, N)

Living together on our own I noticed changes...on our honeymoon he completely changed...he sulked...he didn't talk to me... (Gabrielle, N)

More commonly, the women particularly noticed changes in their partner's attitude and behaviour during pregnancy or after the birth of their children. The following quotes convey the experience of the 20 women who described such changes.

Jasmine, Jessica and Emanon first experienced physical violence whilst pregnant:

He was so nice to start off with. The bad crap started when I was about seven or eight months pregnant with my first son... (Jasmine, P2)

He actually started bashing me when I was pregnant with the first one... (Jessica, P2)

...the domestic violence started when I was three months pregnant and continued all the way through... (Emanon, P2)

Whereas Hayley, Wendy and Anita had prior concerns in the relationship, these were exacerbated after the birth of their children:

I think it changed a hell of a lot when I had my first son...there were little things that worried me before...but it was never to the point where I thought we couldn't work it out...do you know what I mean? (Hayley, N)

I was in heaven when I had the kids. Just loved it but that's when the real fear of him started... (Wendy, N)

When he became a partner in [name of firm]... a year after [first child] was born... there was this huge dominance from him... (Anita, P1)

Although the women noticed significant changes in their partner's treatment of them, they were unable to articulate what these were:

I just wanted to run but I couldn't run because I was so trapped....no words, no comprehension but inside I could feel something but I couldn't realise it... (Sharni, P2)

There was no escape...I wracked my mind who I could speak to. I didn't even know what I would want to say...how to describe it...what was fear and just the feeling of absolute unhappiness... (Sally, P1)

I didn't know what was going on...I didn't have the words...just so much discomfort and confusion and...where would I start and what would I say and who would I say it to... (Virginia, N)

A lack of comprehension resulted in the women finding various explanations for their concerns. All of the women wanted to give their partners the benefit of the doubt:

I thought it was just a phase...I just put it down to being because I was getting so close to having the baby... (Jasmine, P2)

... because I was pregnant I had all these airy-fairy ideas that once I had the baby everything was going to be fine... (Jessica, P2)

Oh, he wasn't happy over here to start with and I thought...oh well...we are squashed in a little unit, you know, it is a bit cosy... (Amy, N)

I wondered if he would maybe feel better if he changed his job...or worked less... (Genevieve, N)

Most of the women felt the changes were because their partners felt deprived:

When our son was born he was exceedingly jealous...he would never admit it, of course... (Veronica, P2)

I asked him,, would he mind very much if we had a child and he said, oh well, yes that's okay, as long as you don't neglect me...and that's where it fell to bits...he loves [our child] very much but yeah, she was interrupting his schedule and taking time away from him... (Penny, P2)

It was also common for the women to feel guilty and question their own sanity or contribution to the relationship difficulties. All of the women, apart from Caroline and Cassandra, wondered if they themselves were at fault:

...I was so anxious I couldn't sleep during the day. I knew that if I slept he would take the baby. I had this need to be with the child. I don't know whether that was another level of distrust. Like gut instinct that something was not quite right but I kind of put that down to because I am not quite right... Maybe I am a bit whacky in the head from sleep deprivation...and I was told that as well, you know...I didn't know about power. I didn't even think about the power stuff. Like he was enjoying the power over me... (Amy, N)

I could only see I am the reason... and I didn't want to make my husband unhappy... (Sally, P1)

You can't quite work out whether you're being treated badly or you are bad... (Leanne, N)

Where the partners had a problem with gambling, drugs or alcohol, for example, it gave the women some context for any changes in their partner's behaviour. For example, Sally, Wendy and Barbara's partner had a drinking problem, Caroline's partner had a gambling addiction, Elle's partner smoked marijuana and Sebrina's partner had a cocaine habit:

It took me 20 years to realise drinking wasn't the problem... (Sally, P1)

...he used it as a crutch but I also used it as that was why he was like he was, but it wasn't...without it he was still not a nice person at times...that just exacerbated or brought out in louder terms... his aggressiveness...it was already there...it is just that it was worse when he was drinking...being in a supportive group for friends and partners of alcoholics didn't fix it... (Wendy, N)

...and for a while...that's just the grog...we'll have a child, he'll settle down...all those things you kind of give them a second chance but in the end you realise you have given them a thousand second chances and you can't do it any more... (Barbara, P2)

When I got pregnant...he was a chronic gambler and a chronic pot head...when he had no money or couldn't get pot...that's when we would have a fight and break up...he's trapped himself you know...I mean that's half the reason why he's the way he is... (Caroline, N)

You know...he smoked marijuana...I kind of blame that too because there were always different personalities...he would be moody all the time...I thought it was marijuana rather than abuse and I asked him to give it up... (Elle, P1)

He had a cocaine habit when I met him...when I found out he was married I called it off and came home...and told him to work out how much he wanted to be with me... (Sebrina, P2)

There was also the perception that maybe such behaviour and feelings of distress were typical of all relationships and thus some confusion as to whether to hope for anything else:

The trouble is...you see it happen so much that you really sometimes think you, there's no, you're not really entitled to expect anything else. Everybody's doing it...I saw a lot of that kind of thing. I didn't see many equal relationships so maybe to think to hope for anything else is to be, um, fantasising...or selfish... (Karly, N)

An additional problem was that because they could not clearly articulate what was wrong, they were not sure whether to talk about their concerns and how they would be received if they tried. Veronica and Gabrielle, like all of the women, were reluctant to confide in their friends because of their partner's public persona:

With his charisma and his charm and socially you couldn't pick it up...you know we were all friends and he was such a funny man... (Veronica, P2)

Out in public, he was the best parent, he did everything for the kids...in public...in private...he just switched off... (Gabrielle, N)

It was by this stage difficult to extricate themselves from the relationship because of the deeper level of commitment reached. The women had competing concerns. They really wanted the relationship to work, despite their misgivings. A lack of clarity and support, the complexity of loving their partners, wanting to be loved, hoping for change and to keep the family together created tension:

I had children who I loved to death and I so desperately wanted it to be all right... (Wendy, N)

I didn't want to be a failure...I had to do a good job at this marriage... (Gabrielle, N)

My father would have killed me for pulling out of another wedding... (Jane, N)

... they will think I am nuts and that is a huge fear... (Sally, P1)

In contrast are the stories of Cassandra and Caroline. Their relationships were shorter than those of the other women and less committed. Both women described how their relationships ended at the first relationship milestone, which was when they unexpectedly fell pregnant. Although Cassandra and Caroline describe their partners in a similar fashion to the other women, their lack of time and investment in the relationship reduced its impact on them. Caroline was also able to pin her partner's behaviour on other factors, such as drugs and alcohol. They both therefore have a limited presence in this chapter. However, the stories of both these women merge again with the other participants when they talk about their post-separation shared parenting experiences.

Fear

The fear was always lurking... (Sally, P1)

As their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style emerged, the women's experience of boundary violations increased. This was often at a time when they had been expecting an increased commitment and negotiation of issues. Fear was a prevalent impact of being trapped in these dynamics. The experience of fear was multi-layered and complex. The layers are summarised as being:

- The fear of their partner
- The fear of friends and family
- The fear of being professionally misunderstood
- The fear of being legally unprotected.

The fear of their partner

Their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style involved a relentless assessing and monitoring of the women's behaviour. This seemed to go hand in hand with an undercurrent of hostility. The women described living with an ambient fear; a simmering and all-pervading level of tension and apprehension.

Lola Lucia, Virginia, Barbara and Jasmine convey the fear of their partner's unpredictability. They felt unable to accurately gauge or predict what their partners were capable of:

It was like walking on bloody razor blades...I didn't know what was going to happen...Yes, I was in fear of my ex. I thought he was going to kill us; he could bounce off in any direction at any time. I was so tense when he walked in the door. If he was beside me I knew what the risks were better. If he wasn't with me he was an unknown quantity...The fear completely affected my personality... (Lola Lucia, N)

I was always skating on ice...I didn't know what he was capable of or how far he would go... (Virginia, N)

It was so unstable... I couldn't predict what this man would do... I wanted to leave but I really didn't know what he was going to do to us...and he had a rifle... (Barbara, P2)

I never knew if he was going to have a dummy spit over it or not...if he was going to explode...the whole attitude, the whole air, it is so much happier and more fun when he is not here. He walks through the door and everything is so intense that you can cut the air with a knife, sort of thing...I was always in fear... (Jasmine, P2)

Alice, Penny, Sue and Genevieve give graphic examples of the mental and physical impact of the fear:

I walked on eggshells to avoid his anger...it's mind altering...you don't know what to do... (Alice, P1)

The last couple of years when it came time for him to be due home from work I would just get so nauseous. My stomach would be in knots and I would just feel ill until he actually got home and did whatever and settled himself down on the couch for the afternoon and then just, oh, it's a sickening feeling... (Penny, P2)

I would wake up with fingernail imprints in my palm... from clenching them so tightly in my sleep... (Sue, N)

I was never able to feel safe, secure or settled...I was up in the air and poised for...I never knew quite what...but something...there was always something... (Genevieve, N)

I was terrified of him...I was in fear 24/7...I'd come home and I could hardly get up the stairs because of the things I knew he'd make me do...and I couldn't say no or he'd get back at me another way...maybe worse... (Leanne, N)

The fear of friends and family

The women were also aware of the attitudes of friends and family who were not always supportive or did not understand how the women were being treated. Friends and family would sometimes see the relationship only from the male's point of view. This represented an additional level of fear to most of the women. With the exception of Karly and Sam, the women described how they themselves would be seen as the problem:

My father-in-law said it's the fault of the women; they provoke the men by crying. I took his opinion to heart that I had just handled my husband the wrong way... (Sally, P1)

His mother was anti him marrying me. She tried to break us up and blamed me for our problems. She was funny with me around the children; she would take them off me. My ex was almost worse when his brother and sister came to stay, he would pick on my dinners etc. They are all know-it-alls. They didn't care what position they put me and the children in... (Jodie, N)

His family felt I was the problem. I was mean to him and I was too intense and unhappy...that is such a laugh...more like I was too scared to be myself and he was mean to me! (Virginia, N)

The only family I had in Tasmania were his family...they would have supported him on anything... (Emanon, P2)

... [his mum] said, well, you do come from a dysfunctional family...you are too sensitive...don't be so bloody sensitive... (Anita, P1)

...as far as they're concerned... I am an evil person...I left him when he most needed me... (Jane, N)

The situation for Jessica, Emanon, Jasmine, Summer, Barbara and Elle created high levels of fear because of the extent of the threat from their partner's families and associates. Jasmine and Jessica explain the intensity of this fear:

If I took him on, I was taking on the whole bloody family...they were really big criminals...and they were watching me...I was scared, you know, they were so bad that they would start on my family. I got to the point where that's where I thought I had got myself in to...a little mafia... (Jasmine, P2)

I didn't only have to contend with him, though, I had to contend with his family, the people he was associating with... I had his family who would turn up at the shelter and go... 'Well, he said he didn't do anything so show us the marks...' and I'd be there with black eyes...and then it would go, 'Well, I am going to kill

myself', so then I'd have his family saying, 'If he kills himself we are coming after you... how dare you leave our son. How dare you make him cry? How dare you make him feel like he doesn't want to live anymore?' They become an extension of the perpetrator. Not only are you traumatised by the beltings and the emotional abuse, it's the family... (Jessica, P2)

Fifteen of the women felt trapped and afraid of the attitudes of their own family, whose sympathies lay with the women's partners. This was either through ignorance or as a result of the way the women were portrayed publically by their partners:

My daughter and family were sympathetic towards him always and never towards me. It was always poor him, you know he is this, that and the other... so if I was going to them trying to say how unhappy I was they would always take his side...my family hold me accountable for the failure of the relationship, they don't see it as emotional abuse. (Collette, N)

My mother told me if I left, she would never speak to me again... (Alice, P1)

My family thought I was exaggerating ... (Sally, P1)

It was like everyone was against me...my own family thought he was lovely and I just needed to work harder on my issues...I started to believe them actually... (Genevieve, N)

Most of the women did not know how to articulate their position to their families, or felt too ashamed. Jasmine and Sam did not tell their families for fear of the dangerous ramifications. Nine of the women, (Karly, Amy, Caroline, Sam, Anita, Wendy, Jodie, Sebrina and Jasmine) had strong family support. However, their family were often as unclear as the women themselves about the dynamics that were causing the problems. It appeared, however, that the stronger the family support for the women the better they fared post-separation. Wendy, Jasmine, Caroline, and Anita benefitted from having fathers who backed them unconditionally and had some influence with their partners. Jodie's father provided support before he died:

When my dad was alive he would talk to me about my ex, he was my husband then, he had some clout with my ex. When he died, my ex lost no time in leaving... (Jodie, N)

The women's fear of their partners was intensified by their fear of being blamed or abused by friends and family, and a sense of being isolated, trapped, blamed and vulnerable permeated the women's accounts.

The fear of professional misunderstanding

A further layer of fear related to being misunderstood and blamed if they sought professional support. Many of the women turned to outside help in the form of self-help books, pastors, doctors, psychiatrists, social workers or counsellors. There was a strong theme of professional intervention that failed to provide the women appropriate support, validation or information. This increased their confusion and made them fearful of how they would be responded to professionally in the context of shared parenting arrangements.

A very typical counselling scenario is explained by Sally. She describes her partner as using distress and self-pity with their pastor and the first counsellor they saw. From her point of view, he avoided addressing his contribution to the relationship issues and was not encouraged to do this. However he opted out of counselling with another counsellor who confronted him:

My pastor said to me one day...Sally, what have you done to start all of this...we went to [counselling agency]. She saw my husband first and when we went in together she was reserved with me. She didn't get it and she sided with him. She said, 'I know you scream at him,' but I didn't. She thought he wanted to get me into bed more often...the male counsellor at [counselling agency] was really good. But my husband would not go back because he explained a few things to my husband and made him think outside his own square...His point of view is always the right one, he opted out of counselling because it didn't get him what he wanted. He is hell-bent on getting what he wants... (Sally, P1)

Jodie felt that her psychiatrist considered that she was the problem, and Jane's counsellor showed greater interest in her childhood than what was happening in her relationship:

I was referred to a psychiatrist and they make you feel like because this has happened to you, you're the one who needs to be sorted out and I felt like my husband's behaviour was really bad and he got really well looked after... (Jodie, N)

I ended up going to this guy...he was creepy. I think maybe he thought the root of my problem was in childhood... (Jane, N)

A sense of isolation was common to the majority of the women. This was compounded by their experiences of being misunderstood:

There is nowhere to go to talk...you've got everyone against you, you know. What do you do? Why bother going to court...why would I...just to be abused again... (Alice, P1)

You just feel so stranded...there is a lot of wrong people out there...if it wasn't for having that right person, I wouldn't have got anywhere and that's the whole thing of it. You've gotta have the right person. I would have been lost otherwise...I would have been an emotional wreck... (Elle, P1)

Amy felt her counsellor responded more positively to her partner. She received more useful counselling post-separation:

Our counsellor...I never got the opportunity to see her on my own...she would tell me to calm down or you know...she really pegged me as a bit over the top I think. My ex was as cool as a cucumber and he would often set me up just before we got there. I had to beg him to go to counselling and I would have to pay for the appointments...he is an intelligent man and he loves a game...luckily the counsellors from [another agency] have heard this stuff before and they know their stuff...otherwise I would have imploded... (Amy, N)

In contrast, Sharni, Veronica and Jane received counselling during their relationship that changed their lives:

He told me, I don't usually say this but you need to get out. He is treating you appallingly. He is deluded. I kind of went ooooooh... and for the first time, because I had a mediator there, someone to shut him up, I was actually able to say what I felt and it was such a release. It was like, you know, and I sort of blurted out all this stuff I had wanted to say for years but had never been given the opportunity because he shouted me down, walked through, walked out of the room and turned the music up louder or whatever... (Veronica, P2)

When I moved...I got in contact with an agency...it was a bloody lifeline, when I look back over a long period of time it changed my life...as I got stronger, she said, you don't have to leave yet...she gave me a spiritual basis to work from...that sort of help that you get that is non-judgemental, that is very freeing...that is the first time that I felt love and acceptance. No pushing, no

shoving...it was enough to set me on fire again to find the truth, my own truth. I asked him to leave... (Sharni, P2)

...he was very upfront...my ex didn't like that...I saw the counsellor on my own and explained the relationship to him and he said, I don't want to frighten you but I recommend you see someone just for yourself...he is the type of person who is likely to take his life and those of yours and the kids... (Jane, N)

The fear of being legally unprotected

The women were also frightened by an increasing awareness that it would be difficult to have their experiences legitimised in order to be legally protected.

For the women who experienced physical violence, they knew that even if there was an Apprehended Violence Order in place to protect them, there was little to protect them from the concomitant psychological threat that their partner represented and the multitude of other ways their partners impacted on them. For Elle, Alice, Anita, and Sally, who experienced physical violence on one to five significant occasions (strangling, suffocating, hitting, and punching) but never reported it, it was difficult to convey the nature of the entire relationship. These women experienced a range of abusive tactics for which they felt there was no legal protection.

The women who did not experience physical violence found that the threat that their partners represented for them was very difficult to convey and legal protection for them was limited. These women nonetheless experienced severe tactics of abuse. It appears that some of the most difficult experiences for the women in this study were where their partner did not use physical violence but were nonetheless hostile and vengeful. This was the case for all these women except for Wendy and Jodie, whose partners were hostile but more inclined to be negligent than vengeful. The women who experienced one or several episodes of physical violence (Alice, Elle, Sally and Anita) experienced hostile and vengeful behaviour and felt very vulnerable.

Overall, living with fear both trapped and isolated the women. It made them feel responsible and to blame and very vulnerable. The women described various lengths

of time where they could manage no more than to simply survive the dynamics of their relationship.

Surviving

*...you just do what you've got to do to survive; it's a survival mechanism...
(Sharni, P2)*

An important impact of the web of abuse was a narrowing focus in the women's lives. Confusion, fear and relentless pattern of boundary violations resulted in the women narrowing their focus to just surviving their situation and trying to keep it all together. The comments of the following women explain the difficulty in doing anything other than just functioning.

Lola Lucia and Virginia describe the experiences of most of the women in regard to the amount of energy it took to function and avoid embarrassment:

... I was just trying to survive... There were times when I felt like such a cardboard cut-out of a mother because of living with someone like him and trying to get my life together...not telling anyone what I was going through because it was too embarrassing. I didn't have much to give at times... (Lola Lucia, N)

I had to put everything into just getting by...I was too confused to know what else to do and I didn't want to look bad and besides that I had no energy for anything else...I was scared of a lot of things and I just couldn't hope to keep up... (Virginia, N)

The constant flow of abuse affected their ability to recall events and see the patterns in their partner's behaviour. Jane, Amy, Wendy and Amy reveal how confusion and the cognitive debilitation of constant boundary violations reduced their ability to function:

I am still reeling from what he did last week. How am I going to remember something that he did to me 12 months ago...there's just so much of it...I didn't choose to be there... I just couldn't find a way, I suppose, to leave safely... (Jane, N)

My head was a mess and I could hardly remember, you know, the old me was getting crippled with his behaviour. The old me did not know that he didn't

have the rights he said he did. I honestly believed that he could do what he liked... It is kind of like until you see the pattern over and over and over that you think, oh, there is a pattern here... (Amy, N)

I don't recall a lot...I think I just did it and you know...you get up and go to work and you do it and, um, yeah, routine. Every day...you live in hope or you survive until the next...nice moment... (Wendy, N)

You don't recognise...you don't want to realise it...I was just existing, not living... (Anita, P1)

...it's not like all the attacks are coming nicely in a row...it is more like you are in a...it is coming every which way and you don't know which way to defend...you might be able to stand up to some things but there are a million other things that go beneath the surface or you just can't quite get the grip of...and it was too hard and too fast to bother with so you just tread water and don't go under...why should you have to be doing this with someone who was supposed to love you and be your partner...his force was just stronger than my capacity, understanding and knowledge to stand up to it... (Genevieve, N)

Jessica sums up what was the predicament of all the women. Although her relationship was physically and sexually violent, the sentiments are relevant to each of the women:

And if I didn't give him sex he'd keep beating me until I did and I always wondered afterwards if he got a thrill out of it. That was years down the track but at the time I was in survival mode. At the time it was just do what you are told... I was too traumatised by all that was going on to actually sit back and analyse stuff... and then I've heard other people say I chose to do that. Well, no, you don't, because you don't realise what you're doing... You can't stop them and you're trying to survive the best way you can in amongst it... (Jessica, P2)

The emergence of their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style forced the women to over-focus, adjust and accommodate to their partner's moods, needs and wishes at their own expense. Whereas adjusting kept themselves and their children as safe or as stable as possible, the inability to meet their own needs and keep sight of their own perspectives resulted in a loss of confidence, a disruption to their sense of self and a loss of emotional, mental and physical well-being.

Loss of confidence

I don't know that I probably had enough confidence in my own ability... I think he eroded that a fair bit... (Wendy, N)

A significant impact of living within a web of abuse was a gradual loss of confidence and a concomitant increase in self-doubt and self-blame. The women described how their confidence was eroded by their partner's hostile, blaming and defamatory stance toward them. Although they attempted to stand up for themselves, this was never received respectfully. Hayley, Genevieve and Elle describe a decrease in confidence during the relationship:

It made me feel like I was stupid. It made me feel like, after a while...when I first met him, I didn't think I was stupid but after having been with him for a while I started to think, 'Oh, I am really not very smart and, yeah, and started thinking... I used to be smart when I was a kid because I used to do well at school...I really did start thinking I...didn't have the ability to do much and...amount to much. (Hayley, N)

I had always done well at things...but I couldn't do well in that relationship. My confidence was rock bottom and I became a different person...no-one could believe the changes in me, least of all me... (Genevieve, N)

That's the big thing...it's the confidence...to keeping that confidence there because I did lose it...I couldn't even function left or right... (Elle, P1)

Their partner's constant criticism and refusal of any accountability further diminished the women's confidence. Chronic self-doubt affected the women's belief in themselves and they felt the problem must be with them:

I started to think I didn't have a very good grip on things...or I didn't see things clearly...If I did stand up for myself I never seemed to do it properly...I dealt with it by thinking he doesn't love me, or maybe I am very annoying in some way or maybe I just didn't feel I deserved any better... (Karly, N)

...no self-worth...totally this is my fault...I need to lose weight, I was too fat, I was too lazy... I can't fit into a bikini... (Anita, P1)

I've read that many self-help books...I was so busy trying to fix me...I thought I was a worthless piece of shit that wasn't worth loving. Didn't deserve the treatment and didn't deserve to be treated good. I was always told that... (Jessica, P2)

A loss of self-confidence led to a strong narrative of losing sight of how others saw them and who they really were:

I didn't have my 50th birthday party...I am still not sure if people like me or not... (Sebrina, P2)

I doubted everything I did. Because everything I had done was criticised...I was actually starting to believe what he was saying...I was hugely affected...hugely. My self-confidence was rock bottom, I think...I was convinced I didn't have any friends and that was from him... (Veronica, P2)

...a lot of self-doubt... a lot of self-doubt. I think that is common with lots of women who have gone through this....and with that self-doubt you don't know who you are... (Barbara, P2)

A loss of confidence and an increase in self-doubt and self-blame negatively influenced the women's perceptions of themselves.

Loss of self

I got lost. I still don't think I know who I am, what I am and where I fit in... (Jane, N)

The women all reported how their relationship negatively affected their sense of self. A frequent description was having lost their sense of self:

I think I just must not have been able to find myself in it at all... (Karly, N)

I totally lost who I was...I used to be this really... I was actually a very strong willed...let's get into life as much as we possibly can...I don't know where that went...my sense of self was taken from me without my permission... (Gabrielle, N)

I felt like I just got lost, there was no [Leanne] left... (Leanne, N)

I could never relax when I was married to him. I sort of lost who I was, in fact, um...what I found out was that I would pass everything through him. I had no opinion of my own anymore...like slowly, slowly I depended on him for his opinion on everything... (Carol, N)

Many of the women described their sense of self as reduced, broken, destroyed or squashed:

My ex reduced my sense of self to zilch...I had to reinvent myself again ... (Lola Lucia, N)

I feel fractured...I see now that is what women mean by saying, who am I? (Sally, P1)

Shattered...I lost who I was...I didn't even see myself as me anymore (Amy, N)

I'd been taken. Me...been destroyed. I didn't know who I was anymore...where I belonged (Alice, P1)

To ruin me and to try and squash and get rid of who I was as a person...I've given up trying to work out that bit... (Elle, P1)

Some of the women described not knowing who they were:

I didn't know who I was; I wasn't who I was... (Barbara, P2)

I had no idea who I was...my whole past just disappeared as well... my whole identity died with it. You can't see the emotional abuse...can't see how it accumulates and the emotional scars... (Jasmine, P2)

I wasn't even really fully aware of how I no longer knew who I was... (Virginia, N)

The women often gave graphic descriptions of how badly their identities were affected:

I was like the walking dead...I was very sick...there was no [Sharni]...When we are in abusive situations like that, our own identities are so squashed that we take on the other. Through no fault of our own, it's just how it is... (Sharni, P2)

I felt like I was just left a zombie... I had had a lobotomy... (Anita, P1)

I may as well have worn a bhurka...I became a nobody... and a nothing... (Genevieve, N)

It was like I was a nothing, no-one...I did not matter... (Carol, N)

The expense to the women's sense of self from their efforts to adapt to their partners is clear in Sebrina's comments:

He had two affairs; the second one hit me like a brick wall...I thought I had become the person he wanted...I had chopped and changed aspects of myself to stop it from happening...I had stopped questioning him and kept my doubts to

myself...he said it was over but he lied...I found out it was still going on...he said I was the one who had to deal with it... (Sebrina, P2)

Such a detrimental impact on their sense of self led to a sense of being unable to survive within their relationship. Many of the women expressed a sense of dying.

Sense of dying

Had I not left, had I decided to stay I would not have the boys I have today. And I don't know...I probably wouldn't be here... (Hayley, N)

Whether or not the women identified as having experienced physical violence, many of them expressed a concern with saving themselves psychologically, or they would be unable to continue to parent. A sense of dying was a prevalent personal consequence of losing their own sense of self and their own perspective. Karly and Jane explain:

I was going to go under if I tried to continue...in the end I just got so emotionally, you know, blown out. Physically I wasn't coping well and I just couldn't see how I could keep living like that either so it ultimately affected me and then it was really just, how are you going to sit in this or are you going to get out and save yourself...I would have died had I stayed...you feel like you are fading away...you even know you can't talk to them about it...I thought it would kill me. It wasn't so much that I wanted to die, I just felt like I would be just dying a slow death...but I couldn't afford to. I'd be no use to the children... (Karly, N)

If I didn't go when I went, I may have got not well enough to be able to look after the children... (Jane, N)

The women drew attention to a sense of their demise along with the way the relationship impacted on their sense of self. Although Sam, Alice and Jasmine experienced physical violence, they refer here to a sense of their psychological death as well:

I was going to die. He was going to end up killing me... (Sam, P2)

If I had stayed, I would not be alive today... (Alice, P1)

I would... if there hadn't had been kids... I would have lay down and died... (Jasmine, P2)

Related to a sense of demise was a strong theme of intense emotional distress.

Emotional distress

I can't and couldn't grieve because I was told I had caused it... (Jessica, P2)

The women's narratives reflected a deeply alienating and debilitating emotional distress. This included anger, guilt, grief, anguish, and loss of trust of themselves and their partner. A prevalent difficulty was trying to maintain emotional balance within the web of abuse. Their partner's blaming stance, lack of empathy and accountability created a heavy burden and their emotional distress was still palpable regardless of how long they had been separated. It was the reason three women declined to be interviewed face to face after initially agreeing. One felt able to complete a telephone interview and two women asked if they could write their stories.

The women also described a variety of symptoms of stress within their relationships that demonstrated clearly the impact of the relationship on their health. The comments of Elle, Sebrina and Sam describe some of the emotional impact of the web of abuse on the women:

I was absolutely emotionally wrought...I felt like I was losing it... (Elle, P1)

I was a mess...I was an emotional wreck...I couldn't meet the kid's needs...I couldn't meet my own... (Sebrina, P2)

Even after all this time...I can still just break out into...my emotion...it is just a trigger...like I can just break out...I can crack in a split second... (Summer, P2)

You are basically dead...I had no emotion when I went home...at all...I couldn't cry...didn't know how to laugh...I couldn't get angry...I couldn't get sad because I was drained physically, emotionally and mentally...so I had nothing at all when I left. Nothing... (Sam, P2)

The long-term experiences of emotional distress were described by many of the women. For example, Lola Lucia had been separated for six years at the time of interview and was still aware of the extent of her anger:

Is that something that he saw in me and could use that or was that going to be there anyway? I'm not real sure...you know, it was supposed to be... and is it

so hard to be so nice? Why is it so bloody hard? Why did it have to be that hard and, um, so I just think, oh well...I almost feel like I have indirectly got a personality disorder that I have inherited from him...I had no rights back then. But anyway, I have now, so all I can do is think fucking never again, never again, never ever again and if I even tap into the anger...ooh, you know...try not to tap into that anger... I think I'll get my head around it before I get my heart around it... (Lola Lucia, N)

Jasmine, Jodie, Cassandra and Sam convey the long-term anguish and grief of the women in being treated like this despite all their efforts:

I said to my friends who got me to leave, what did I do wrong? What did I do really? What did I do to deserve it? They just kept telling me it wasn't my fault, it was who he was. That's the type of person he was. And it took me a long time to accept that. You know, that I couldn't make him to be the person I wanted him to be....and I hated myself for getting into it... (Jasmine, P2)

I blamed myself for the marriage breakdown and wondered what I had done wrong. It took me years to realise it wasn't my fault – I had done him no wrong and it was his doing, not mine. I had tried to make it work... (Jodie, N)

I'd gone to these great lengths and everything that I'd done, said, whatever, has been twisted and used against me and its like, well, how stupid am I... (Cassandra, N)

And you think...because those of us that have been abused, we know what we were like before...and you sit there and you think, my god, why didn't I see this coming...why didn't I see it? How could I have put up with that crap? God, I must have been stupid not to have seen it... (Sam, P2)

Sally explains the emotional distress in the loss of trust:

That trust, if I ever had it, is shattered. I've been accused... you don't trust people do you... but how can you when the person you trusted your life with, who said in such convincing ways they loved you and has done unspeakable, really unspeakable damage really... (Sally, P1)

Loss of health

I am mental... I shake inside... (Summer, P2)

The women all reported the effects on their mental and physical health of living with the web of abuse. Symptoms of anxiety and depression featured strongly as responses

to their partner's core attitudes and behaviours and most of the women had been on antidepressants in the relationship.

There was a sense of anxiety and hyper-vigilance in all the women:

I was anxious, I was scared. I suppose in hindsight I could have looked as though I was on drugs because I was constantly nervous and agitated... (Emanon, P2)

I was constantly tense with my partner around. I remember the times he went away, I could breathe again...I could relax and eat what I wanted and think what I wanted... (Carol, N)

I'd taken to sleeping on the couch in my clothes with my car key in my pocket... (Barbara, P2)

My anxiety and stress levels had burnt out to the point that even now if I get too anxious or stressed about something I will vomit or I will get diarrhoea and there's nothing I can do about it. I used to be able to deal with stress really well, now I can't deal with it at all... (Sam, P2)

My self-esteem decreased in relationship with him. I started drinking to cope, after work and before I went home, because I didn't know what would happen. Would he be okay or would he be abusive...once I got my independence I didn't need to drink anymore... (Alice, P1)

...before separation I was on antidepressants...at any time during the day my hands would be shaking...I told him I can't medically and physically take this anymore...I had to do something...I was getting too close to suicide then...I had no control over my body...I took valium and stiff drinks to get through...his solicitor questioned whether I was a fit mother because of the drugs I was taking... (Leanne, N)

Collette was diagnosed with post-natal depression with her second child:

I think by then the reality of my situation was just really falling on top of me...I was in the hospital for about six weeks. My partner had said to my psychiatrist that he thought, ah...part of my mental health problems were because I had never had orgasms...so one of the things they did in the hospital, I mean, I kind of laugh and scream about this at the same time, they got to me with a vibrator, um, had me lying flat on a typical examination table; hard, white... (Collette, N)

One woman, Jessica, was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Seventeen women described themselves as having 'nervous breakdowns' which referred to

times, before the relationship ended, where they were totally unable to function in their lives for an extended period of time. One of the women experienced this three times. Three of the women who had nervous breakdowns had psychiatric treatment entailing a stay in a psychiatric ward and a diagnosis of a mental disorder. Jodie and Sharni speak of how that would be used against them:

I started yelling at the top of my voice, why me, why me! What have I done? Why did he do that to me? Why? They [the psychiatrists] said my problem was schizophrenia so I was put on medication. What I think I needed was grief counselling. My ex would have turned that around on me and said, see, look what I had to put up with... (Jodie, N)

You're not mentally ill, he said, you just want your own way all the time. That's how these people think, that's how they use blackmail. You're selfish, you're too bright, and you're too... you do everything... you're bad, you're doing this...and you're doing that... (Sharni, P2)

Eighteen women considered they had been suicidal but had not wanted to leave their children. The comments of Amy, Leanne and Barbara are typical of this dilemma:

The only reason I didn't kill myself was because it might have hurt the child. I can't leave this world because I am the only source of stability that little child has got... (Amy, N).

...I almost couldn't decide whether it was best for the kids if I killed myself and he would have them...or whether to stay alive, separate and share them...I am still dealing with this ten and a half years later although I am remarried...I am still struggling to stay alive... (Leanne, N)

I got chest pain one weekend...went up to casualty because there was nothing really wrong with me and I went back home and I realised I was falling into a depressed state...and I thought it would be a lot easier if I just went down the river, put some stones around my waist and just walked in...and that was as fleeting as it got...you have to survive...you have got your kids so you do have to struggle for some things... (Barbara, P2)

Sharni tried to commit suicide several times:

It breaks your spirit...my powerlessness...banging my head against a brick wall...I had no self-esteem, no self-respect, I didn't know who I was and suicide attempts were regular. So I ended up an outpatient of a psychiatric ward...the wanting to die left me two years ago and wanting to live became a priority and keeping up the fight...and it is a fight...if you have suffered the

physical and mental abuse that I've suffered...it's a wonder I am still around...but I didn't want to hate, I wanted to understand... (Sharni, P2)

Sue was prevented from doing so:

If it weren't for them [a doctor and a friend] I would have tried to commit suicide... (Sue, N)

A number of the women described the impact on their physical health. For example, Jane had a period of blackouts that were attributed to stress:

I was having episodes where I was blacking out...literally blacking out...I would just faint...I would just switch off...they stopped me driving...I went to the neurosurgeon and had scans...and he said, tell me what is going on in your life...I really do think you need to talk to somebody... (Jane, N)

Insomnia, exhaustion and weight loss were also common to the majority of the women:

I didn't sleep...my head never ever, ever switched off...there was nothing left of me...and it became a me and us or him thing... (Jane, N)

By that stage I was having nightly...I don't know if it was Librium or some sedative...I would trot off to the doctor in the evening to get my sedative injection in my bum just so I could get some sleep. That is how debilitated I was... (Collette, N)

I lost so much weight... I woke up with fear and anxiety...I couldn't eat or sleep...I was an absolute mess... (Sebrina, P2)

I wasn't looking after myself. I was like a stick...I was like a rake...I looked like I was going to die...and I was real gaunt and I couldn't do anything...I used to wake up in the morning and vomit... (Summer, P2)

The web of abuse impacted very heavily on each of the women. They described confusion, fear, loss of confidence, loss of self, a sense of dying, emotional distress and a loss of mental and physical health. These effects were common to all the women in their pre-separation relationship, except for Cassandra and Caroline. The pivotal effect appeared to be confusion, because of the difficulty in detecting and articulating the dynamics of their relationship. The main effects were not sequential but highly interrelated, and appeared to be a generalised response to the way the web of abuse denied them equality, agency or autonomy. The relentless blaming and

defaming stance of their partners in addition to their partner's refusal of accountability encouraged the women to introspect on what was wrong with them as a person, or on what they doing so wrong, that their partners would treat them in that manner.

The women often described a defining moment which heralded greater clarity for the women and the eventual demise of the relationship. This was frequently when the dynamics of the relationship were disrupted or reduced because of outside factors.

The beginning of the end

The women conveyed the enormous costs of being in a relationship where all their energy went into simply surviving. Defining moments allowed them to see the futility of continuing to pay these costs. These moments occurred when the women had some respite from their partner's presence and control, or they discovered concrete evidence that validated their instincts that something was wrong, or they received helpful intervention. This facilitated the recognition of the extent of the impact their partners were having on them and heralded the end of the relationship.

Jane and Virginia, for example, had defining moments when their partners were away from home for several weeks:

I don't think I was ever really fully aware of it until he had his accident. Until that complete control...he wasn't able to assert it...it wasn't until probably that point I just realised how bad it was... (Jane, N)

While he was away, I could breathe. I could sleep. I enjoyed my food. I almost laughed at the TV. I thought...what exactly am I getting out of this relationship? I couldn't think of anything... (Virginia, N)

For Penny, it was observing her partner's behaviour at his party:

...all of a sudden he wakes himself up and starts abusing this friend of ours...he actually stood toe to toe with my friend... and I thought, you know, that's the first time he'd ever done anything in public...I thought that's really showing your spots, isn't it, buddy...to do it in public in my mother's house of all things...and a few other things like that... (Penny, P2)

All the women spoke of needing concrete evidence to back up their sense that something was wrong in their relationship. For those women who were not experiencing direct physical abuse, it could be very difficult to pinpoint the problem. Sue, Amy and Sally sought proof to confirm their suspicions:

He'd tell me he was going to the... club and I felt terrible – I knew he was up to something. I needed evidence as to what my instincts were telling me and, yes, she was meeting him there. I should have gone for adultery but I didn't want to hurt the children... (Sue, N)

Oh, another thing was that he would nick money out of my wallet and tell me I had lost it...so I got to the point where I was actually writing what I was spending my money on. And I knew. So, I would ask him and tick, yep, sure enough, that money was gone... and he would lie about it. Tick. So again it was proof, it was kind of like, I am not losing my mind, this is factual stuff...proof I am not nutty...it had to be clear...what he says is not true...he is trying to fuck me over... (Amy, N)

I think I had become quite wary, that is another thing and I felt guilty for it. I looked out for other signs. Not about a woman, that never entered my mind. Didn't think he carries on with a woman but with money. I had this feeling it's just not coming together... (Sally, P1)

Gabrielle, Sue, Carol, Jodie, Lola, Hayley, Anita and Jasmine were left by their partners for other women. For these women, the discovery of their partner's affairs was the final straw:

It took me 18 years to get to that point where it's like...I've had enough...what made me have enough was when he had the affair and he involved it in the family, he actually impacted on my family...he would invite her to the house... (Gabrielle, N)

Defining moments were eventually followed by the women's refusal to comply or accommodate any longer. For example: Lola, Sue and Jasmine refused to comply with their partner's extra-marital affairs and Amy refused to move; Virginia and Genevieve both refused to comply with their partner's sexual disrespect; Sue, Lola Lucia, Gabrielle and Jasmine confronted their partners about their affairs; Cassandra refused to comply with her partner's treatment of their child; and Caroline refused to comply with her partner's wish for her to have an abortion. A refusal to comply signalled an increase in hostility and revenge for all the women:

He wanted a son, like, I knew he wanted a son but she was a girl, there was nothing he could do about that... and then he went and tried to organise for me to have a termination...and I said no, and that's when all the shit started... (Caroline, N)

She [daughter] was meant to be home by seven...he didn't bother to ring me...and eventually he brought her home in the early hours of the morning...she was cold, wet, dirty and hungry...it was the greatest shock to him that I had rung the police. I dare say he went [to a party] and then got stoned. Probably he did fall asleep for quite a while. Who was looking after our child I don't know...and because I refused to accept such behaviour it went down-hill from there (Cassandra, N)

Although Cassandra and Caroline describe their partners in a similar fashion to the other women, their shorter relationships and lack of investment in the relationship reduced its impact on them. Caroline was also able to pin her partner's behaviour on other factors such as drugs and alcohol. They both therefore have a limited presence in this chapter. However, the stories of both these women merge again with the other participants when they talk about their post-separation shared parenting experiences.

Irrespective of whether the women were left by their partners or ended the relationship themselves, they required some sort of intervention from family, friends, counsellors or professionals to understand many of the features and extent of their entrapment. These interventions frequently contributed to defining moments for the women. For example, friends intervened for Jasmine but could only do so when her partner was in gaol:

She [a friend] landed on my doorstep... and her second husband...and they told me...they sat there and I was physically exhausted...she said, you don't think you can cope with all these kids but...who the fuck do you think does it when he's not here? Who does everything anyway? (Jasmine, P2)

For most of the women, such intervention did not occur until post-separation, and then only to some extent. The inability to fathom the complexity of their situation and to understand the nature of the abuse persisted long after separation. It was clear during the interview process that the women lacked clarity around some aspects of their experience. Some women had not been socially validated or legally legitimised about the abusive dynamics in their relationships; others had remained silent about

their experiences. Often the women found it difficult to articulate or name their experiences. Their description of their relationship was clearly indicative of several forms of abuse but they had no awareness of this. The women conveyed that they still did not fully comprehend the totality of their experiences.

Figure 2, on the following page, presents the findings of this chapter as an additional layer to the web of abuse presented in Chapter Four. It summarises the impact of the web of abuse woven by the attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners and conveys how this reverberated throughout each aspect of the relationship.

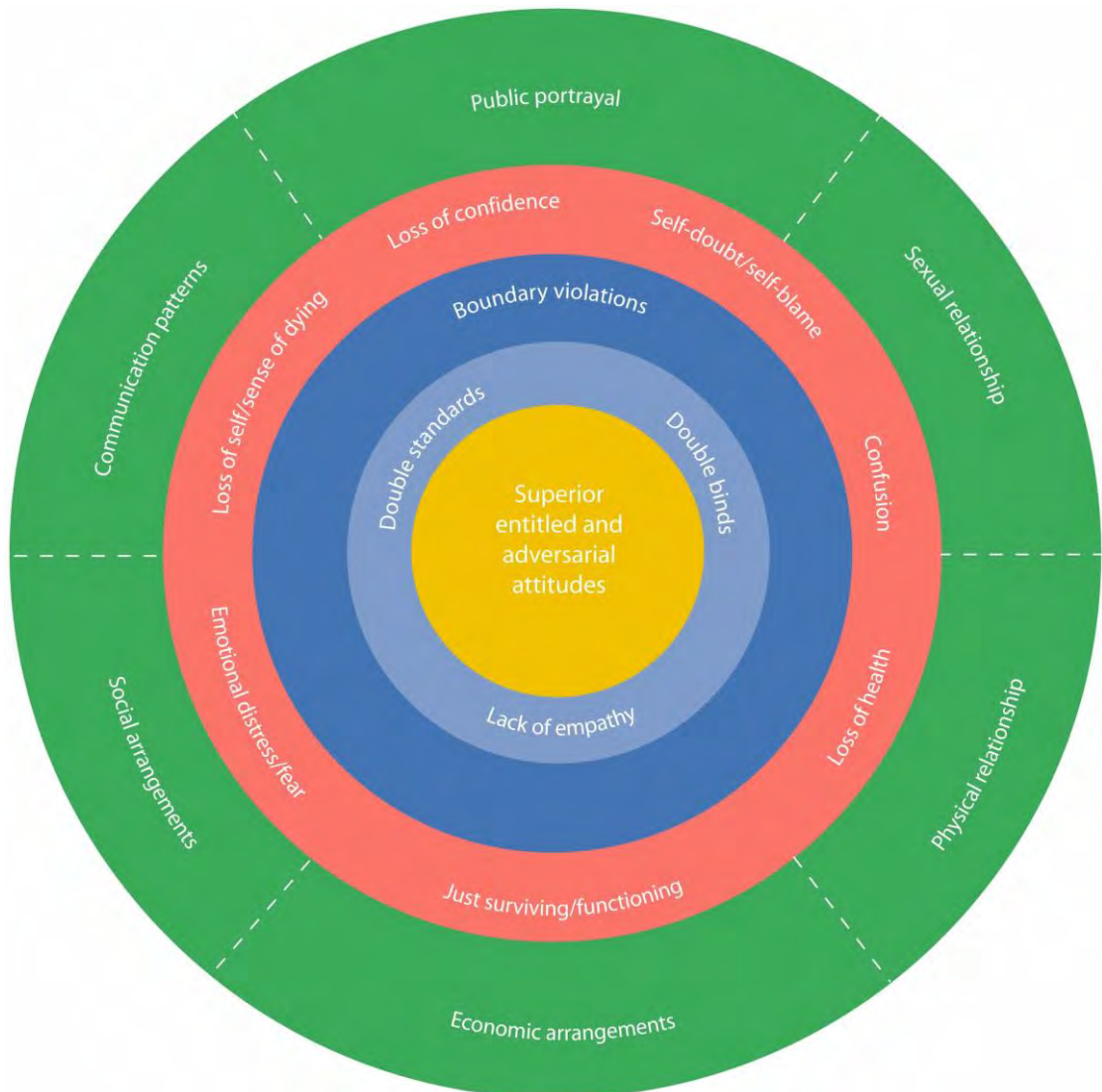
Mitigating factors

The extent of the impact of the web of abuse was mitigated by several important factors. Those women who received correct information regarding their situation (i.e. from counsellors, therapists, friends and family) blamed themselves less for the behaviour of their partners.

The women who experienced less defamation abuse and social isolation were able to retain some confidence and sense of self. Wendy, for example, had the support of work colleagues who could see that her husband was treating her badly. Having supportive friends and family was also helpful and her partner was less able to successfully defame her because of his obvious alcoholism. Barbara worked to get her partner to take responsibility for his abuse and violence, which he acknowledged to the children. This changed the dynamics considerably. For the other women, the impact lingered. This was the case even if they re-partnered, as in the case of Jane, Collette, Sue, Jasmine, Barbara, Leanne and Emanon. The restoration of their confidence and sense of self, for example, was an ongoing process.

Other factors that mitigated the impact of the web of abuse were the women's own attribution of the problems in the relationship and their feelings of culpability. This, again, was influenced by the extent and success of defamation and isolation tactics used to alienate the women. As a result of the lack of understanding of the dynamics relationships which are abusive even if not physically violent, it was more difficult

Figure 2: The Impact of the Web of Abuse



for women such as Leanne and Collette to gain support or intervention. Collette was defamed by her partner to her family, their children and her social network, and felt unable to get her life on track despite remarrying and moving. Leanne lost all of her friends and some family because of her partner's defamation.

Similarly, it was easier for women such as Caroline and Wendy, and those that supported them, to attribute at least some of the problems in their relationship to

external factors such as their partner's use of alcohol, level of intelligence, a possible mental disorder, or a poor upbringing. Although both women had partners who had problems with alcohol, Caroline's partner appeared to be more revengeful. He vigorously defamed her post-separation and pursued 50 per cent of the parenting time but not 50 per cent of the costs or responsibility of raising the child. Although Caroline's experience post-separation was particularly difficult, she was not so affected by him on a personal level:

I probably always thought I had one over him – like I always thought that I was a bit smarter or something...and I had the family support and financial resources to raise my child... (Caroline, N)

When the women reflected on their partners' change in behaviour after significant milestones were reached within the relationship, many of them felt similarly to Amy, Summer and Barbara:

I almost believe he turns into this creature when there is any element of need of him or demand on him. So he is ok if it is all about him and doing his own thing and he is quite free to do that, that's what we were. But I didn't realise there was this secret side to him... (Amy, N)

They can be so nice when you first meet them ...and then down the track when they have you... this control, then they are really nasty... (Summer, P2)

...he was extremely charming to begin with...that you didn't see the non-charming side...very rarely...then he got to be less charming and I suppose he didn't have to be anymore because he had me and he knew I was going to stay around so therefore the need to be nice wasn't as great... (Wendy, N)

He was just a little boy who wasn't going to grow up or wants to be responsible I guess...I think we are both responsible to a point for the relationship breaking up...I am responsible because I grew up and went...yes...I don't need to be treated like this... (Veronica, P2)

Another common reflection was the possibility that their partner had a mental disorder:

I'm wondering whether or not he does actually have a mental condition like a psychosis or a split personality or something that has never been diagnosed...he can just flip so there's got to be a reason... (Barbara, P2)

He's got to have some kind of mental issue...he's a psychopath...or he's borderline or he's just an arsehole...I don't know what the label is... (Lola Lucia, N)

Despite the reasons the women had for their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style, the impact of it was an important obstacle to restoring their lives post-separation, particularly when they encountered the same style within their shared parenting arrangements. Their lives improved the less contact they had with their partner, or the more their ex-partner's influence was restricted.

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

In this chapter I have illustrated that, with the exception of Cassandra and Caroline, the women were impacted in similar ways by the web of abuse outlined in Chapter Four. They appeared to be responding to the overall pattern of being denied equality, autonomy and agency in their relationships.

The cornerstone to the women's responses was confusion. They did not recognise the patterns underlying their partner's behaviour which ensured the defeat of any of their attempts for equality, autonomy or agency. The persistence of confusion undermined their foundation. The defining moments that heralded the end of the relationship appeared to initiate a process of clarity of the stranglehold their partner had on the dynamics of the relationship, which allowed the possibility of disentangling from them. However, regardless of the clarity they might have gained, the women were unable to prevent the continued violation of their boundaries post-separation because of the lack of a socio-legal identification of and response to the disempowerment within their situation.

The focus of the following and final data chapter explores the women's experience of post-separation shared parenting arrangements in light of the web of abuse and its impact on the women.

Chapter Six: A Post-Separation Web of Abuse

Introduction

Shared parenting is really just a polite term meaning you are still under the thumb... (Genevieve, N)

The first data chapter of this study, Chapter Four, outlined a set of dynamics that created a web of abuse for all the women in this study. Although the web of abuse did not always include the experience of physical violence, the pattern of boundary violations denied the women equality, autonomy or agency within every aspect of their relationship with their partners. The second data chapter, Chapter Five, reported on how the women described the impact of the web of abuse. Both these chapters provide the necessary context for this third and final data chapter on the women's post-separation experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold. First, it reports on the women's experiences of negotiating shared parenting arrangements. Second, it highlights the influence of their ex-partner's attitudinal and behavioural style on these arrangements. Third, it conveys the additional opportunities and sites for their ex-partners to engage in a post-separation pattern of boundary violations. Overall, this chapter demonstrates the capacity of the web of abuse to extend into the women's post-separation lives irrespective of the specific details of their individual arrangements. However, it is equally important to note the successes with which the women in this study have had in parenting and restoring their lives post-separation. Their determination for and pursuit of a better life for themselves and their children can be appreciated to a far greater extent when seen in context of the energy they had to expend to counter the obstacles created by the post-separation web of abuse.

I begin by describing how post-separation parenting arrangements were dominated by the need to negotiate time with and responsibility for the children. I then describe how the attitudes and dynamics identified in the web of abuse extend into the women's post-separation shared parenting arrangements. This is followed by an overview of the way the women's ex-partners continued to treat them physically,

sexually, economically, socially and verbally, and in their public portrayal. Finally, I present a pictorial representation of the findings.

The Web of Abuse in Shared Parenting Arrangements

Because we have a child together I am still partly a possession... (Sam, P2)

The fact that the women were still linked to their ex-partners by children created a post-separation variation of the web of abuse. At the heart of the women's post-separation narratives were descriptions of their ex-partner's attitudinal style towards their role as a father. The superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes outlined as being at the core of the web of abuse were also reflected in their ex-partner's approach towards shared parenting arrangements. The women described how their ex-partner's attitudes were reflected within their expectations to not only determine the shared parenting arrangements, but also to have their demands and needs accommodated. The consequent behavioural style was adversarial and violated the women's boundaries and needs regarding their maternal role. The double standards and double binds underlying the pattern of boundary violations continued to affect the women's lives and create fear.

'Paternal time' and paternal responsibility

The women described how their shared parenting arrangements were dominated by their ex-partner's sense of entitlement to determine the amount of time they spent with the children and the level of responsibility they were prepared to take for their children's needs. A universal theme was how 'paternal time' (time spent by the father with the children) would wax and wane, irrespective of the children's or the mother's needs. Despite the actual percentage of 'paternal time', the women felt that their ex-partners avoided responsibility for meeting their children's needs. This continued the pre-separation overload of responsibility and the material, emotional and economic cost of having to accommodate their ex-partner. Common to all the women was a strong sense of injustice at the lack of responsibility shown by their ex-partners towards the children.

The percentage of ‘paternal time’ varied significantly for each woman in this study. It ranged from periods of no paternal time, to periods of various percentages of paternal time. For some women there was the threat that their ex-partners would pursue custody (for example, Virginia, Genevieve, Amy, Collette and Leanne). The percentages of paternal time were privately arranged, mediated, or court-ordered. A guide to the types of paternal time spent with the children is presented below. This is followed by Table 2, which summarises the range of paternal time with the children that was experienced by each woman.

‘Intense’ refers to those periods where the arrangements were characterised by a higher percentage (approximately 30 to 50 per cent) of regular paternal time with the children each week. For example, the ex-partners of Amy, Cassandra, Caroline, Genevieve, Virginia, Carol, Wendy, Leanne, Elle and Anita had the children regularly for two or more days per week until they either reduced the time (as in the case of Wendy), refused paternal time (as in the case of Carol), or the children reached the age of 18 (as in the case of Leanne).

‘Low’ refers to a short but regular period of paternal time, such as every second weekend. For example, the children of Karly, Wendy, Jane, Sam, Penny and Elle had periods of low but regular paternal time.

‘Irregular’ refers to short but irregular periods of paternal time with no discernible pattern. For example, Karly, Lola Lucia, Genevieve, Gabrielle, Virginia, Sally, Anita, Jasmine, Jessica and Sebrina all experienced a period where their ex-partners only saw the children on an irregular, ad hoc basis. For Lola Lucia, Sebrina, Gabrielle, Jodie and Sally, this was the dominant form of shared parenting arrangement.

‘None’ refers to a period of no paternal time with the children. For example, the majority of the women in the non-physical violence group experienced a significant period of time (several months or longer) where their ex-partner would not see the children. This was frequently after separation but also interspersed throughout the different shared parenting arrangements prior to interview.

‘Denied’ refers to those periods where the father kept or kidnapped the children and denied the mother any access. For example, Hayley’s ex-partner kidnapped the children for a period of several months and denied Hayley access to the children. Sue, Alice and Elle left the family home and their ex-partners initially denied them access to the children for several months. Genevieve’s ex-partner refused to bring back the children from a visit and denied her access for several weeks.

‘Restricted’ refers to those periods where the father kept the children and restricted the woman’s access to them. This was the case for Sue, Sharni, Jane, Emanon and Elle. None of the women restricted the father’s access to the children.

‘Moved’ refers to relocation. Collette moved interstate with her new partner and the children initially had holiday visits to their father. They then moved back with their father. Wendy’s ex-partner moved interstate after a period of regular contact and then had the children on holiday visits. Amy’s and Leanne’s ex-partner initially moved interstate and had no contact. Jasmine’s partner moved to another part of Tasmania and had very irregular contact.

‘Disrupted’ refers to the arrangements being legally disrupted. Summer’s arrangements were legally disrupted because of her ex-partner’s behaviour towards the children. Jasmine’s arrangements were legally disrupted because allegations of sexual abuse were made towards her ex-partner by another child. Jessica’s arrangements were legally disrupted when the children were reported to Child Protection. Emanon’s arrangements were disrupted when she was assisted to flee interstate with the children.

Table 2: The Range of Post-separation Paternal Time with the Children for Each Woman

Group 1 No physical violence from partner pre-separation Shared parenting current at time of interview	Group 2 Experienced physical violence pre-separation Shared parenting current at time of interview
1. Amy, N moved/irregular/intense	1. Elle, P1 denied/restricted/low
2. Karly, N none/low/irregular	2. Sally, P1 none/irregular
3. Lola Lucia, N none/irregular	3. Anita, P1 irregular/intense
4. Cassandra, N none/intense	4. Penny, P2 none/low
5. Caroline, N none/intense	5. Sam, P2 none/low/lower
6. Jane, N none/low/restricted	6. Sharni, P2 none/denied/restricted/intense
7. Gabrielle, N none/irregular	7. Veronica, P2 intense
8. Genevieve, N none/irregular/intense/denied/low	8. Summer, P2 none/intense/disrupted
9. Virginia, N none/intense/irregular/none	9. Sebrina, P2 none/irregular
Shared parenting finished at time of interview	Shared parenting finished at time of interview
10. Hayley, N intense/denied/none	10. Alice, P1 denied/irregular/none
11. Collette, N moved	11. Jasmine, P2 moved/none/irregular/disrupted
12. Wendy, N intense/low/moved	12. Emanon, P2 restricted/denied/intense/disrupted
13. Sue, N denied/restricted	13. Barbara, P2 low
14. Carol, N intense/denied/intense/none	14. Jessica, P2 none/irregular/disrupted
15. Jodie, N none/irregular	
16. Leanne, N moved/intense	

The women in this study described how shared parenting consisted of periods of different arrangements with the children. They felt the changes had been dictated by their ex-partners and described the difficulty in countering their ex-partner's demands for changes to the amount of paternal time. In addition, they either experienced or feared professional and legal support for their ex-partners to exert such control. Superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes are evident in the following examples.

Sam was raped by her partner on the night she left and later discovered she was pregnant. Whereas her ex-partner initially fought for regular contact with their child, he then changed his mind and took her to court a second time:

His lawyer stood up and said, „Your honour, at the moment my client sees his daughter every Saturday, every single Saturday from when she was four months old he has had to see her. My client feels like my colleague’s here client is putting a gun to his head, forcing him to have his daughter every single weekend of his life...he wants to see her every second Saturday from 10 to 1:30... (Sam, P2)

Caroline’s ex-partner, on the other hand, was initially disinterested in the child but then decided he wanted 50 per cent of time with but not responsibility for his daughter:

I will still be the primary carer so I am still liable for the overall maintenance of my daughter financially. He may have her for 50 per cent but will not be 50 per cent responsible for her financially – he is not required to pay 50 per cent of her costs. He has 50 per cent rights but not fifty per cent responsibility...her father is long-term unemployed and unable to care for her financially... So I, just...he wants the pension. The single parent’s pension, so he wants 50 per cent and wants Centrelink to decide who should get the pension...they’ll most likely stay with me but there’s always that element of doubt because I work...with him I don’t think she’d get the education level, she wouldn’t get the values we have in my family...she’ll end up like him, a third generation dole person...if he gets any more time she will lose out and she won’t get the family... (Caroline, N)

As well as dictating how much time they would like with the children, the women also described how their ex-partner could also deny the children any paternal time. The majority of the women described periods where their ex-partner refused to take any part in the fathering of their children. For Gabrielle, Jodie, Lola Lucia, Hayley, Sebrina, Jessica, Alice and Jasmine, periods of withdrawal or avoidance of the children for no apparent reason (such as moving) remained a constant feature of shared parenting up to the time of interview. These women felt unable to exert any influence for the sake of the children and their parenting issues were different to the women in more intense shared parenting arrangements. The women had to manage the children’s responses to this withdrawal and were left with an overload of responsibility:

I think they get high expectations of their dad...and then they're let down. It's not right. I used to build them up too when I was with him because I was like that. So they're like that...very devoted...but...his mind and his devotions aren't with his children anymore like they used to be and it's like losing somebody... and not getting them back. He just didn't want to be known as a dad... (Jodie, N)

She does not stay weekends with him, only goes on outings occasionally and I, you know; I don't know why that is... (Lola Lucia, N)

I wasn't trying to keep the children away from him, I just couldn't get him to commit to anything regular so they knew where they stood...I did tell my son that it would be alright, he would still see his dad and dad wasn't really available for him enough in the early days which you know was sad... (Karly, N)

For someone who said he lived for his children he saw them very little in the first years and I never got in the way. He said... he slept in the car...it made me worried and my youngest cried... he was lying...he admitted later to me...that was nasty, I thought, to make your child cry for you. It was sick. He was the adult and my son the child but he made his child emotionally look after him. He was the child to his child. He seemed to lose interest in the children and they tried to ring him and he would not answer or ring back. He would have his phone off the hook and he said it wasn't working but I don't believe that... (Sally, P1)

Several women described periods where their ex-partners refused or restricted their time with the children. For example, in the immediate period after Sue, Elle, and Alice left the family home, their ex-partner kept the children and denied or restricted the women's access:

He said he would keep our son. He took my son's passport. My lawyer said it would cost me \$20,000 to get him back. I could only get access when my ex said it was okay; access was totally under his control. I found it all horrible. I was suicidal and depressed but I got no treatment. I was empty; I didn't have my feet on the ground. I wasn't whole again until I got my son back... I was in a dreadful state and couldn't fight the financial settlement and I could see my son was being abused...in the end my son was dumped on my doorstep with a cardboard box because he told his father he wanted to live with me... (Alice, P1)

I loved him and he turned on me. I doubt my children understand to this day what really went on and how I was unable to be a mother in the true sense of the word once I left...he wouldn't let me. It was so wrong for them and so unnecessary. I doubt he feels guilty about any of it...he acts as if I am not there...I like to think it hasn't affected my relationship with my children...I

always rang them and went to their sports days and things at the school. He poisoned my two boys against me – he never let me have them... If I suggested it he'd refuse and fob me off. But he left them on their own a lot to fend for themselves while he had time with the new woman...I'd go up to the house...I'd sit in the car and the boys would come out and visit...this would happen for years...I'd go and watch them at sports and support them anyway I could...what do you need... but really he abused them by not letting them have a proper relationship with their mum... (Sue, N)

The majority of the women had younger children at the time of separation. They had many years of a shared parenting career ahead of them and expressed unease at how their lives would be affected by their ex-partner's stance towards their paternal rights:

After we broke up I was terrified. He knew that. He would often say...when he was living interstate...oh, I will come and get [child] whenever I please ...I encountered a lot of prejudice from professionals backing him up ...one mediator made it sound like I was a trouble-maker from hell because I questioned why they were concentrating about 50 per cent time and not 50 per cent responsibility. And I questioned where she was getting her legal information from because I was getting it from the appropriate source...it felt like I was being bashed about trying to force my son to go to his father more nights than he was able to cope with. The child was only four and he hadn't seen his dad for two years... (Amy, N)

He wasn't working at the time because he quit work when he found out he had to pay maintenance...and he said that he has got an extended family and they can mind the children when he is at work...and I thought...oh...they are going to get my kids...and they are going to take the children off me...and it is the worst feeling a mother could have...and women are forced into abiding by the law regardless of what has happened...the man still wins and they do it sneaky though... (Summer, P2)

As mentioned previously, most of the women, except for Veronica, Leanne and Barbara, experienced a wide variation in paternal time with the children prior to being interviewed. Hayley and Sharni give graphic examples of how this occurred for them. Hayley initially had a private agreement with her ex-partner where he had regular and frequent time with the children. He then kidnapped the children for several months and said he would return them if she signed her economic rights away. Once she signed, he reverted to spending no time with the children. Sharni, on the other hand, could not get her ex-partner to agree to any arrangement until he took the children away and she had to fight to get them back:

He would ring up and say, 'I am coming to pick up the boys'. And I would say, 'Yeah, that's fine'. And then one day he said, 'I want to take them somewhere for a while'. It was like two or three days he had them, I can't remember where, but he was camping... and he never brought them back. That was it...the letter said: you can have your kids back tomorrow if you sign away all your rights to property... (Hayley, N)

He expected to be able and come to take the kids whenever he wanted for as long as he wanted... yes, abusing them when it pleases him...and then he took them...he kept coming around and then he said right, I am taking the kids, we've got a place...we all want to live together to get away from you...and the abuse started in the first week...he was doing the same things with them he did with me...I got them for a long weekend and never took them back...he went off his scone...it was horrific...my case ended up in court. Despite his treatment of the children and his threats and harassment he had unsupervised access and I have to face him regularly...we have a meeting point at the shopping centre...the handovers are horrible...there is an injunction or whatever it is that the welfare of the children...I at some stages had to talk to him...but he can't come to my house ever again...for the first time in his life he has stuck to every second weekend... (Sharni, P2)

In addition to exerting a level of control over whether and to what extent they had parenting time with the children, the women felt their ex-partner elevated their own needs to the detriment of themselves and the children.

An entitled shared parenting style

My daughter said...,daddy got his own way' ... (Cassandra, N)

Central to the women's description of the post-separation arrangements was the unrelenting demand that the women would adapt not only to their ex-partner's desire for parenting time but also to their ex-partner's needs. The women perceived their ex-partners as expecting to privilege their own needs and ideas irrespective of the amount of parenting time they had with the children. This resulted in the women having a greater share of the responsibility for the children. Some of the women reported their experience of legal support for their ex-partner's attitudes. Others lived in fear of their ex-partner's use of the legal system against them.

The women who experienced low or intense periods of shared parenting conveyed the difficulty of planning their lives. There was a sense they still had to focus on the needs of their ex-partners at the expense of their own needs and those of their children. The comments of Karly, Amy, Virginia, Anita and Cassandra reflect the same feeling of needing to accommodate their ex-partner as they did pre-separation:

It's nine years down the track from the separation and still I find it easier to keep manoeuvring around their stuff and keep it nice and to be, actually, you know, who they want to be or how they want to be and go after what they want...that for me is really hard... (Karly, N)

He'd take holidays when it was ok for him and we had to fit in with that, he would call the shots. I was always caught by surprise; I never knew what the plans were. Like Christmas, I would ask him what he was doing for Christmas and he would say, oh, I don't know, and then he would leave it up to the last minute. I remember one year trying to put something in writing to him saying this is what I propose for Christmas and bang straight off it was a letter from his lawyer saying, oh no you don't...he wanted what he wanted when he wanted...I honestly believed he could do what he liked. He could walk into the property and take what he wanted. He was telling me he could do these things... (Amy, N)

I am trying to lead a life where this guy just keeps breaking agreements and bullying me into new ones... (Virginia, N)

...I said to her, why are we in mediation if he's broken those agreements and it's only been three weeks, what's the point of putting new agreements out there... (Anita, P1)

...I always had this dream...but it will be a long and lengthy battle to do that...to get the court order changed...or even for our child to change schools...if he didn't agree, he can say no and if I go then I am breaching court orders...I'm kidnapping her really...I can't go anywhere...if I want to I'll have to take him to court first... it's misogynist, chauvinistic and narcissistic...we have to think up a new term for that one really...the combination of all three... (Cassandra, N)

Elle gives a graphic description of how she is forced to accommodate her ex-partner despite this being at the expense of the child's safety:

He accuses me of hitting her...any bruise is because of me hitting her. She comes back from access and hits me...really hard. I asked her, who does this to you, and she says, daddy does. I think I will take her to counselling. I've seen him slap his other son. When I asked him what he did with our daughter on access he says, none of your business. Yet he expects me to tell him everything,

even if she falls over. She doesn't even turn two until [month]. She has contact once a fortnight on Friday, Saturday and sometimes Monday. It has to all be on his terms. I tried to facilitate access with him cooperatively but it is all on his terms. She looks like a stunned mullet when she returns to me...she is obviously intimidated by him...she is too young to say what is going on for her...there is no negotiating possible in this situation...it is a waste of time to try with him...he scapegoated me and got the counsellor on side and painted me as a nutter... (Elle, P1)

Much of this accommodation was related to the ongoing fear of further punishment from their ex-partners. The women reported parenting in ways that would avoid their ex-partner's wrath or condemnation. Comments by Caroline and Leanne reflect the feelings of all the women who experienced periods of intense shared parenting arrangements:

...I am always watching myself because if he gets one little thing that he can manipulate and go to Child Protection or anything about, he would. I know he would...so it's made me always watch myself...it's not so much that I am pandering to it...it's just that I,m aware of what he's capable of. I'm aware of the way he works in his mind... (Caroline, N)

It was ten times worse afterwards than what it was before because of the court orders...my bible...I had pages of rules and regulations to live by...it was traumatic...all the kids' things had to be packed and clean...there would be abuse and harassment if I got it wrong...he was coming to the house despite the rules as these meant nothing to him...except as to how he would benefit...anything had a repercussion, no matter what I did. I was back in court and no one seemed to listen to me...he wanted to get back at me for kicking him out...I had to prove everything, he had all the rights...I had to live by those orders all the time and he was just out to get me... I had to stick to his rules or there would be abuse and harassment... (Leanne, N)

The women in any form of shared parenting arrangement also felt their mothering role was reduced to revolving around and compensating for the type of fathering role their ex-partner decided to take:

When he is with his dad, my role has finished. I've always been the boy's mother and they want me to stop being his mother for 50 per cent of the time...I feel like a mammary gland or a free babysitting service...He had refused to tell me the address of his new house and even my lawyer says I have no right to know...child contact has become a clinical, no-win practice... (Amy, N)

I feel like a wet nurse or an incubator...I look after the child when he doesn't want or can't have the children...otherwise hand it over without complaint... (Cassandra, N)

...it was like I became secondary...I was supposed to stand by, hat in hand and heart in mouth...and revolve around his fathering needs and role like he was some sort of god...legally I sort of disappeared or something... (Genevieve, N)

An adversarial shared parenting style

...it was like, fight me to the end... (Karly, N)

Irrespective of the amount of time their ex-partners had with the children and the ways in which they accommodated their ex-partner's needs or demands, the women described the negotiations of all shared parenting arrangements and issues as highly adversarial. Underlying all of the women's comments was their fear of their ex-partner. As a result, they felt unable to hold their ex-partner to account or ask them to be more responsible for the children. An adversarial style was of significance to the women irrespective of paternal time with the children.

Although the women were united in their descriptions of their ex-partner's adversarial and competitive stance towards any aspect of shared parenting, this was particularly defeating for those women who separated when the children were younger.

Ex-partners who had a high level of paternal time and were hostile and vengeful caused high levels of distress. This is well illustrated by the comments of Amy, Jane, Virginia, and Sharni:

He knew what he was doing and I said, you can leave the property now, and he said, you can't make me. As a resident, I can, I have the rights to ask you to leave. Leave the property. And my ex, 'interpreted' that as I threatened him with the police, I forced his child to be removed from him, you know this is the legal letter that I get from him...He wanted to break me basically. He has wanted to do that. He likes that. He likes to have a fight and win. It is about winning, not what is good for the child...I was under attack most of the time...I know it's going to go on... It will just go on... (Amy, N)

He will be okay for a while then he will get a bit narky and then if being narky won't achieve what he wants so probably being nice hasn't achieved what he wants and then he'll just get nasty and then you go back to the coping

mechanisms...I have to learn to constantly adjust my thinking and my strategies. Just when I think it is ok he comes up with another way to get at us... "I don't think that I'm ever going to be 100 per cent secure in myself until I don't have to have anything to do with my ex... (Jane, N)

I just see years and years of this...if I think about it I get depressed...it won't ever change...it is not like he will ever give up and go away... (Virginia, N)

...your mother is a slut and a whore and she doesn't know anything...she's not a good mother...you need to come and live with me...that happened for three years...poor buggers, they would come home with the blood drained out of them and the life force sucked out of them so I'd have to patch it up...I could no longer relate...I felt so numb...it ground me down...it wasn't ever going to stop... (Sharni, P2)

Sharni, Penny and Jasmine had apprehended violence orders (AVOs), as their ex-partners had regularly subjected them to physical violence. The AVOs had no impact on the level of hostility and blame the women encountered post-separation. A sense of defeat is clear within their comments, which also indicate the extent to which the web of abuse continued post-separation irrespective of the lack of time their ex-partners spent with the children:

He just kept coming around and coming around and he said, right, I'm taking the kids, we've got a place, we all want to live together...to get away from you...but what I'm saying is having someone who you have asked to leave still coming around even when they've been on restraining orders and had more orders...because what happens is when you are affected and having this person in and out of your life, you can't grow, you can't mature, um, well you can but only about five per cent. But you've still got another 95 per cent that you're missing out on. It's almost like someone puts the lights out – but you're so powerless...So at the end of the day, his influence, because of my powerlessness, it just felt like for so many years just banging my head against a wall. Having this incredible beauty and character in me and not allowing it to surface... (Sharni, P2).

...he is still texting me after three and a half years...they say things like, please call me before I do something stupid...if you don't come home I will do something stupid...if you don't answer me soon I will have to knock on your door and ask you what I did to deserve such treatment...I think AVOs are wrong. I needed to have it. It saved my sanity but at 12 months they cut it off and he's free to hammer the hell out of you again so you go and get another one and they give it to you for six months and then it stops and then he hammers you again...by allowing him to have the visitation with the children they are facilitating his access to me even though the AVO's in place. He's still got that access. He can still niggle, niggle, bite, bite. It's just a shit cycle...you

bust your arse to put them over the other side of the fence and it doesn't work...His constant harassment of what did I ever do to deserve this treatment [because she left him] is just driving me nuts... (Penny, P2)

...in that courtroom, the judge would not renew the court order despite asking about the last time I was physically abused. Everyone else gasped at the detail I gave but the judge refused to renew the court order and it made my ex cocky...and he started to stalk me. The judge handed the power straight back to him by not renewing the court order. I spent a lot of time looking over my shoulder... (Jasmine, P2)

The shared parenting experiences of Cassandra, Caroline, Carol and Hayley included periods of intense shared parenting arrangements. Although they had not experienced physical violence, they also clearly convey the extent of the issues they had with their ex-partner. There was the potential for their ex-partner to take them to task on any issue regarding the children:

...at that stage and even when he accepted the extra time, I knew it wasn't going to finish there. I wasn't sleeping, wasn't eating. Um, the effect of that constant harassment... and the fact that he could possibly get away with...yeah, get away with it...he will persist... I wouldn't let my child take the day off school because...I could see my ex jumping up and down about that. Oh...she won't send her to school...won't send her to school... (Cassandra, N)

...I think it is just hate...I don't think he realises why he hates me. I don't think he understands, I don't think he remembers and I don't think he knows, but I think he feels that he has to hate me... so he does... (Caroline, N)

I was too scared to confront him...it got so scary for me that I would have somebody in the house when he returned the children...he was a maniac...this went on for years...one child actually at one stage stopped talking completely and the other was terrified of the whole thing...the law was not defending me...I felt vulnerable...I felt absolutely at my wit's end with all of it...he was like a monster... (Carol, N)

He would go against everything single thing I would say no to... he would say yes to. Like, he was undermining my methods to discipline them or just to raise them, just to do anything, he was undermining everything that I did...he was just undermining any chance to...any values that I was trying to instill in them he was undermining those values. Basically saying things like...you know women, always putting women down. Because I had sons, I had two sons... (Hayley, N)

The women explained that a high level of their distress was related to having to navigate any level of shared parenting with the likelihood of adversarial, hostile and blaming communication patterns. These patterns included a refusal to discuss, intimidation, threats and defamation of character. Caroline, Karly, Jessica, Amy and Emanon explain how hampered they were by adversarial and hostile communication patterns post-separation:

I don't really remember a great deal about that year...I was pregnant and working, I got stalked, got threatening text messages, phone calls, verbal abuse every time I pick her up...standing in the street challenging my boyfriend to a fight... (Caroline, N)

He just wouldn't discuss anything...and I would have to wait and wait for ages...I know my son told me that he said I took everything and that's why he, I have a house and he doesn't or I took, you know, more than I should have or something...so I think he's always in a roundabout way put the blame on me so I guess that would've been hard for them to come home to me and know that I'm the baddy of the two...there was no saying I accept that this marriage is over...and let's just make the best of what we've got here and the kids and everything like that. It was no agreeing on anything. We couldn't just say the marriage is over...next step is divorce...next step is...a settlement... (Karly, N)

It's very hard not to feel the problem because it...you're bombarded with it all the time... (Jessica, P2)

Without the help of [service] and a particular psychologist, I would have imploded. It was all made out to be my fault...to everybody... (Amy, N)

...on the first access visit he [child] came back and...I thought he wanted a hug so I leant forward and he punched me in the mouth and said, you are a fucking cunt...dad said I can hit you because you are just a stupid bitch... (Emanon, P2)

A number of women, including Wendy, Jodie, Alice, Hayley, Sam, Jasmine and Jessica, had ex-partners who sought less time with the children rather than more. However, despite these limited arrangements, they described their ex-partner as adversarial. For example, Wendy described her ex-partner's behaviour in the following way:

...he wanted them every weekend...but I said, that's unfair...what if we make it you have them two, I,ll have them one in three weekends...it wasn't very long before he said this is working out a bit rough ...so then we made it every second weekend...you have this silly fairytale image that once you divorce them you

actually get rid of them...no...there's more, in a way...it's more because you have to deal with things and you have to talk things through...it then becomes a huge slanging match and I'd taken all his money away...it was easier once I wasn't on shared territory and it was my house...he would say [to the children] oh, your mother did this or that to me but I don't think he badly...in a constant way, bagged me out... (Wendy, N)

Veronica, Barbara and Jodie had children who were older at separation. Jodie's children were 16 and 19 years of age at the time of separation. Barbara's children were 15 and 23 years and Veronica's children were 17 and 18 years. These three women had different parenting issues to those women whose children were younger. For example: Barbara knew her son was deeply affected by living with violence and then the separation; Jodie was more concerned at the effect on the children of their father's withdrawal from them; Veronica, like all the women with sons, was highly concerned at the socialisation of her teenage sons by their father:

...he has always done that...undermined my discipline from the word go. You know it got to the stage where they would only have to cry and he would run inside from wherever he was, probably sitting on the deck drinking, and say, what has she done to you now, boys...it was undermining all the time and...therefore the boys are fairly rebellious and undisciplined as a result of it... (Veronica, P2).

The women's descriptions of the attitudinal style of their ex-partners led to a post-separation pattern of the constellation of double binds and double standards outlined in Chapter Four.

A constellation of double standards

The three double standards outlined in Chapter Four involve denying the women the same rights, reciprocity and accountability. These were evident in the women's narratives post-separation.

The women conveyed how they continued to be denied the same rights as their partners accorded themselves. They reported that their partner determined the level of post-separation paternal time with the children and also the level of responsibility.

The women felt denied the right to negotiate what an equitable arrangement was from their point of view.

The women's stories also indicate how they were denied reciprocity within their post-separation shared parenting arrangements. They were expected to compromise for and accommodate their ex-partner's demands for 'paternal time' without this being reciprocated. Whether their ex-partner wanted occasional contact, fifty per cent contact or no contact at all, the women felt expected to accommodate and adjust to this. They pointed out that this was often colluded with professionally and legally, despite the adverse consequences for their mothering role, their lives or the lives of the children.

It is also evident within any type or intensity of shared parenting arrangement that the women experienced a denial of accountability post-separation. They found themselves constantly blamed by their ex-partners for all parenting issues, irrespective of the quality of their ex-partner's parenting skills and behaviour. There was also a denial and minimisation of the extent of the abuse experienced by the women pre-separation from their ex-partner; instead, there was an emphasis on either the abuse being a reciprocal process or the fault of the women.

The impact of these double standards was increased when there was professional or legal support for their ex-partner's stance. This support was evident in the lack of legal recourse for women whose ex-partners were intermittently or constantly neglectful of the children's needs for paternal time. Legally there appeared to be a double standard in what was required of mothers and fathers in terms of post-separation parenting. The mothers were expected to accommodate neglect or demands for any level of contact and the father's rights to contact were privileged over the women's concerns. There appeared to be no requirement for accountability as to the patterns of previous contact or previous conduct. The layers of threat endured by the women both pre- and post-separation were overlooked by the socio-legal response, in favour of the possible threat to the fathers' loss of contact with their children.

A constellation of double binds

Given the presence of double standards within the post-separation shared parenting arrangements, there was also the inevitable presence of double binds. These included ‘You are damned if you do and damned if you don’t’, ‘Revolve around me but do not depend on me’, and ‘I will impose on you then blame you’. The fundamental double bind underlying the shared parenting arrangements was, ‘I deny you equality and you reap the consequences’.

The women could not please their ex-partners post-separation and they felt ‘damned if they did and damned if they didn’t’. Despite having to compromise for ‘paternal time’ and the degree of responsibility taken for the children, the women’s efforts were invariably devalued by their ex-partners. Their needs and concerns were seen by their ex-partner as an aggravation.

Amy and Anita express not being able to win:

If I looked after myself to any degree it was met with hostility. And if I thought I was looking after my son’s need it wasn’t about his need... it was about me, according to my ex... (Amy, N)

You’ve got to play this game...because crying at him...you’re only an emotional wreck...yelling at him...well, you are being an absolute bitch...and trying to ask things of them is like...pulling teeth...so you’ve got to find some sort of balance where you can say what you want to say... (Anita, P1)

The ‘revolve around me but don’t depend on me’ double bind is evident in the way the women had to compensate for and accommodate their ex-partner’s parenting role, which could be totally lacking or very intrusive, but at the same time they were often required to answer to their ex-partner for the parenting decisions they made, including where they could live. It was also evident in the way the women could not depend on their ex-partner’s help to problem-solve issues yet were required to answer to them in terms of the way they resolved issues. Virginia spoke of being trapped by this double bind:

He had to have it his way. That was ok; apparently...I was always wrong anyway and made all the wrong decisions...but even when it was all his way...I still couldn’t get it right in his eyes...yet, you know, I could never rely on him as

someone interested in the children's welfare...like you might rely on a father...that was not a clever thing to do as you get your hopes up...he could be as irresponsible and unpredictable as he liked but he still thought I should give way to him about all things... (Virginia, N)

Genevieve spoke of being unable to rely on her ex-partner yet was expected to answer to or defer to him:

...it's all me, me, me, but don't you dare hold me responsible for what all that me, me, me creates in your lives...you can't and shouldn't discuss anything with someone like that...and to be expected to do so by anybody shows a lack of wisdom...I could not expect anything from him or rely on him to stick to agreements...yet I had to discuss things with him or all hell would break loose...who wants to be at the beck and call of someone like that... (Genevieve, N)

The women felt imposed upon by their ex-partner's requests or denial of paternal time, the expectation that they would compromise for the level of paternal time, and the overload of responsibility this entailed. They also felt blamed and defamed for being the cause of their ex-partner's adversarial and abusive behaviour, as well as held responsible for the consequences of this behaviour. Cassandra, Virginia, Sebrina and Leanne's comments reflect being imposed upon and then blamed:

...it was just humiliating...awful to have my daughter sitting in the car saying, I don't wanna go, I wanna stay. She still does it...she still gets edgy about having to go...I believe that he is just too hard on her...it's my way or the highway...it's the same sort of manipulative relationship...what can anyone see in a half hour playing with your child? Oh yeah, [my ex says] I've manipulated her into thinking that she wants to see her dad less...and it's just been an undercurrent, an underlying theme of all negotiations. It's just a double bind. You can't win either way... (Cassandra, N)

He stalked, harassed and threatened me. When I took out a restraining order he blamed me for being the problem and said I was taking him away from the kids and that I always overreacted...I couldn't win, ever...and it's not just about winning it's about being having my point of view equally considered... (Virginia, N)

...anything he does with my son he brags about...but he doesn't tell you that he doesn't show up til really late and reeking of alcohol...it puts me in a very difficult position...he'd give him the wrong amount of medicine and then blame me for the very same behaviour...he yelled at me over the phone that the kids being in my care wasn't as safe a thing as it should be... (Sebrina, P2)

For nine years I was in court and had court orders and it cost me \$35,000 in legal fees. He threatened to have the kids completely but I would have to pay for everything...I used to keep a personal siren on my wrist and the police number on the phone to push and a tape recorder...he stalked me, harassed me, tail-gated me...yet he would cry with the kids...confuse them and they would feel sorry for him and see me as the aggressor... (Leanne, N)

Where the women felt their ex-partner was supported in these dynamics, it caused great distress and resentment. They felt as if they were further denied any chance of equality, agency and autonomy.

Summer and Emanon explain feeling double-binded after leaving a violent relationship by the professional response to their reluctance to sending the children to their ex-partner. Summer and Emanon described their ex-partner as being violent towards the children:

My lawyer had virtually told me I was a bad mother for staying there...but in the interview for the court report the psychologist was saying, well, they are his children as well and how would you feel...and I did not give a shit how he felt...she was sticking up for him too much...I got this 'poor him' back...even if he was a bad father...they still have to see their father...I can be seen as a bad mother...I honestly thought I would lose my babies and I would rather lose my life... (Summer, P2)

...my child was three when I actually got rid of [partner]. I didn't want him to have access to the kids because he had hurt our son in the past...he was their biological father and he had every right to see them...I begged and pleaded with Child and Family Services to have it supervised...they wouldn't do it...I eventually ran away and took the kids...he was like a bad criminal and there were four apprehended violence orders against him but Child and Family Services still insisted that he see the children...I had the court orders saying we had to have access and I refused to abide by the court orders by running away...he was hurting the kids and there was nothing I could do about it so I ran...the police...picked up the kids and gave them back to him...one Christmas I spent two weeks trying to call and they had disappeared...the police couldn't find them...I got severely depressed and attempted suicide...he physically abused them...when they were found they were malnourished... (Emanon, P2)

Although Leanne's ex-partner was not physically violent towards her during the relationship, he had been towards the children. He had also stalked, harassed and tailgated her post-separation and was highly litigious. She felt similarly double-

bound by the response of a court counsellor to her desire to protect the children from him:

If I had stayed I would have probably been unable to protect the children from him...but when he caused so much legal trouble after I separated from him...the court counsellor said, why don't you just let him have the children... (Leanne, N)

An identical replication of the pre-separation dynamics occurred for the women post-separation. The attitudinal style of the women's partners led to a pre- and post-separation constellation of double standards and double binds. This style also led to a concerted, relentless pattern of boundary violations post-separation within all areas of the women's lives, which included shared parenting arrangements. This pattern inhibited the women's attempts to restore healthy post-separation boundaries and invited a range of adversarial behaviours from their ex-partners. There was thus a baseline of unease, foreboding and instability, at least initially, for all the women.

Fear

He [my new partner] says... why don't you just tell him to get stuffed and walk away from him? He said, you can bloody well do it to me, how come you can't do it to him? And I said, the difference is I'm not scared of you, I'm scared of him... (Jane, N)

The women described being watched and assessed by their ex-partner post-separation in a context where there was an overwhelming lack of empathy, goodwill and self-reflection. Not surprisingly, the majority of the women in this study were afraid of their ex-partner. Fear was a prominent theme, regardless of the level of 'paternal time' and a sense of foreboding interfered with the restoration of the majority of the women's lives. A common theme was the monopolisation of the women's attention by their ex-partner's known and unknown capacity to harm them or create chaos in their lives at any time. Gabrielle and Lola Lucia both had ex-partners who spent very little time with the children:

I was so terrified of him... when we separated...I hung blankets over the windows...I didn't tell him I was at uni, he knew I was working, I didn't do anything with the house and the house was basically falling down. When I got

the new car it was like, gosh, what's he going to say about that...? (Gabrielle, N)

In the end I just thought...if you are going to kill me, just fucking do it, you know. Here I am...I'd even leave the curtains open and the lights on. There's the target, just do it...It'd be far easier...it's only been in the last couple of years that I even felt safe enough to get and get myself a beer...oh heck, yeah...because of him... (Lola Lucia, N)

Feelings of fear were heightened for those women who believed that their ex-partner posed a threat to the safety of their children in any way:

No way if I'm still alive he'll get my kids...I have a huge fear of him raising my children... (Jasmine, P2)

I nailed all my windows shut...I was terrified of him...he promised me he would break me mentally and financially and he would see me in the gutter...the worst thing he could do to me was to kill the kids...I had it in my mind...what's he going to do to them or me...he knew that to hurt or kill the kids would be the end of me...the only time I am going to be free is when that man is dead... (Leanne, N)

Fear was evident for the majority of women when the women sent their children to their father or saw him at handovers:

I don't ever want to be in close proximity to him ever again. I really don't, and I feel nauseous when I put my kids on the bus to go and visit him... (Penny, P2)

The dread builds up when I pick the kids up from him...you never know what he will be like. My current partner knows not to talk to me Sunday afternoon as the dread builds before I am due to pick them up... (Jane, N)

I am afraid of my ex because he was abusive. All I see when I look at him is the hatred in his eyes on the night that I left... (Sam, P2)

In contrast, Barbara, Veronica, Wendy, and Jodie were not as afraid of their ex-partners. Although they did not trust them, they felt reasonably confident of their own physical safety. Despite this, they expressed concern about their ex-partner's effects on the children. Barbara had elicited an admission from her ex-partner about his behaviour. Veronica and Wendy had ex-partners that they weren't afraid of in the same way as the other women were of their partners and Jodie's ex-partner had clearly communicated disinterest:

I don't know where I got the strength from that day to ask him to talk to our son in front of me about...why I was leaving...I am so pleased I did it...I talked to his family that year I decided to leave...I knew he respected them...they understood what he was capable of and I think that did keep it in perspective and kept him level...and I was fearful but when I would go away for a weekend I had all my legal stuff in a suspension folder...I would take the whole bleeding lot with me...in case he broke in or cleverly was dropping off my son and I was not at home...I did have a silent number because I wasn't sure if I was going to get menacing phone calls...I did get one phone call that wasn't very nice but I rang the support number at Centrelink and this lady was very good and gave another couple of numbers for services I could go to if I had been hassled...I still don't trust him... (Barbara, P2)

He can't touch me now...I am nowhere near him...you know, I am safe...I am away from him and if he threw stuff at me now I would just look at him in total...contempt, I think...you know, get a life and grow up...tell someone who cares because I don't... (Veronica, P2)

...he would turn up after work on Friday drunk...and there were times when I was inches away from ringing the police and then did that make me a horrible mother in the children's eyes...for getting daddy [into trouble]...I mean my daughter would cry at having to leave me and then she would cry on the Sunday having to leave her father...it was all my fault and look what I'd done to the children so I was very much a bitch...I'd left and made him...and the kids...unhappy... (Wendy, N)

...he wipes his hands clean of his own children really...like, he occasionally sees them when it suits them because he was coming up...won't go out of his way...he came around when I told him to come around to collect his tools...and he just ignored me...I got over my fear of him... (Jodie, N)

Fear was present whether the women had a high or low level of involvement by their ex-partners. It was related to the level of hostility they perceived in their partners and whether there was any threat to the children. The feeling of fear featured not only in the issues concerning the children but within a larger pattern of post-separation boundary violations.

A Post-Separation Pattern of Boundary Violations

The percentage of paternal time did not necessarily indicate the level of responsibility for the children. Nor did it indicate the influence the ex-partner had on the women's entire post-separation life. Irrespective of the features and intensity of the shared

parenting arrangements, the women found their boundaries continued to be violated in other areas of their post-separation life. Even those women whose shared parenting arrangements were characterised by periods of no or low paternal time with the children described how their post-separation life was still influenced by their ex-partner's behaviour in other ways. Thirteen women (Sharni, Jasmine, Penny, Sam, Summer, Jessica, Leanne, Jane, Gabrielle, Caroline, Genevieve, Virginia and Anita) described being stalked and harassed by their ex-partners at a time when shared parenting was minimal, irregular or non-existent. In general, the women also described economic neglect and disregard of their own and the children's needs, sexual disrespect, obstacles to recreating social networks, verbal threats, intimidation, and defamation, which was irrespective of the intensity of the shared parenting arrangements.

This section presents the range of boundary violations the women described post-separation. They have been grouped according to the same aspects of the relationship as in the pre-separation web of abuse (see Figure 1). They represent the boundary violations inherent in the manner the women were treated physically, sexually, socially, economically, verbally and in their public portrayal. However, the experiences outlined within these aspects of the relationships heavily influence and merge with the others.

As outlined in Chapter Four, for example, the use of adversarial communication by their partner was pivotal to the entire pattern of boundary violations experienced by the women. The women's post-separation experience of their ex-partner's communication style was identical to their pre-separation experience. They continued to feel denied a voice and therefore any agency. This style included a refusal to engage, the withholding of useful information or explanations, the obstruction of negotiation with self pity, victimisation, the blame and defame cycle, and the use of sarcasm, putdowns, threats, intimidation and name-calling.

Thus the quotes for boundary violations within the women's communication patterns with their ex-partners are found within the other aspects of the post-separation relationship.

The table on the following page summarises the post-separation boundary violations experienced by the women. The dotted lines represent the permeability of the boundaries between each aspect of the relationship.

The post-separation physical relationship

I said to him once...you know...I don't abuse you, I don't abuse your new partner, I don't wait outside your work and constantly tell you...I don't stalk you...I don't hurl things at your house...I don't phone you all the time...can't you just leave me alone... (Anita, P1)

The pre-separation physical relationship described by the women was inclusive of more than physical violence. Their narratives conveyed the importance to them of how their partner treated their needs and those of the children. Their level of fear of their partner was compounded by the intensity of their fear of the risk to their children's health, well-being, safety and autonomy when with their father. Apart from Collette, who moved to a different state, a pattern of post-separation violations threatened the women's own sense of physical safety and autonomy as well as that of their children:

The marriage dissolved because he'd abused [child's name] way too much, pulled her by the hair, dragged her, and threw her...that was the straw that broke the camel's back. When I asked him to leave he threatened to kill us and set the house on fire so I ran away and went and lived at a friend's place...I got a restraint order but he never kept away and I was too scared to know how to work the system, I was still very sick...there was no [Sharni] ... (Sharni, P2)

...he came up here and banged on the doors and stuff and I wouldn't let him in...he was yelling and screaming at me still two and three days later on...I had to call the police twice...when I rang the police the first time...I got some bloke and he said, I think you need to go to the doctor...I said what for, ,cause I was shaking...I didn't know what this guy was going to do...He said, oh well, you obviously need your head read...you are not a well woman...The second time...they said if he comes in here he is trespassing...my son got so upset he went around and checked all the handles...he said to me, oh mum, I'll just go with him ,cause I am scared he is going to hurt you... (Anita, P1)

Table 3: A Post-separation Pattern of Boundary Violations

Physical Relationship	Sexual Relationship	Economic Arrangements	Social Arrangements	Communication Patterns	Public Portrayal
Double standard Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy	Double standards Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy	Double standards Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy	Double standards Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy	Double standards Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy	Double standards Double binds Boundary violations Lack of empathy
Post-separation experiences of disregard for safety, autonomy, health and wellbeing, threats, harassment, assault, stalking, kidnapping, fear of murder	Post-separation experiences of sexually demeaning attitudes, comments blocking of women’s new relationship, sexual assault, rape	Post-separation experiences of adversarial, exploitative financial settlement, maintenance issues, adequate income and housing issues, interfering with acquisition of employment, changing childcare arrangements	Post-separation experiences of defamation, interfering in social network, monitoring, surveillance stalking	Post-separation experiences of adversarial, threatening, intimidating, withholding conversations, regarding children or any issue, litigation, blame and defame cycle	Post-separation experiences of defamation to children, family, friends, mediators, professionals, judiciary
Post-separation obstacles to restore physical health, wellbeing, safety and autonomy	Post-separation obstacles to restore sexual respect, safety and autonomy	Post-separation obstacles to restore economic independence and security and ability to provide for the children	Post-separation obstacles to restore relationship with self and others, and develop skills and networks	Post-separation obstacles to restore voice and agency in all parenting arrangements and issues	Post-separation obstacles to restore equitable parenting contributions and reputation with others including children

...he used to come up and I wouldn't let him in and he used to go round all the windows knocking on the windows calling out to the children...they would be crying...he went in the end because I said I was going to call the police but then [child] is hating his mother because I am mean...his father is desperately bashing on the doors and saying let me in ...let me in... (Summer, P2)

...he was threatening and threatened physical violence...he kicked our front door in...he came up and yelled and screamed at me many times...the children were there...I actually thought he was going to break the window and was going to come through...the neighbours heard him scream at me...so they rang...the police wrote one out on him that night [an AVO] and I packed up and disappeared for five days...I ended up running lots of times...if I went in kicking and screaming I would run the strong risk of my eldest daughter just walking away from me completely... (Jane, N)

He came up and cut my phone line, I had the locks changed because you'd go home and things would be moved and he'd been there... (Karly, N)

[he said] I'll come up to that house any time I fucking like because it is half mine...finger pointing in my face...it was so aggressive...and so public...he still kept doing things to me that upset me...were cruel...he'd have me on my knees...even now he says I am making life hard for him...I had a restraining order on him...the police lost the stuff...he got off the hook...he always gets off the hook... (Sebrina, P2)

The majority of the women, apart from Barbara, were restricted in the restoration of their lives by a desire to protect their children from a combination of neglect or control of their physical needs by their father. Elle, Caroline and Cassandra express the difficulties they had in trusting that the children would be adequately cared for:

...he used to get...like my ex used to get, instead of hitting my daughter he used to get my son to hit her and punch into her...he doesn't look after them...if it hadn't been for his mother...he would have been hopeless, you know. Honestly, he wouldn't have took it on...I've seen those hurts in my children's eyes, you know, and it's terrible for the mother to see that hurt... unnecessary hurt. I wish he had been a friend to me and a father to his children... (Elle, P1)

...even when he has her on the weekend I send a green bag of groceries because he either can't or won't buy enough good food... (Caroline, N)

He bought her home so late, it was in the early hours of the morning... she was a toddler...and would give me no reason why he didn't call or why she was so dirty... couldn't understand my fear and anger...and it was never addressed in any proceedings... (Cassandra, N)

Collette, on the other hand, had expected her ex-partner would look after them better than the children eventually said that he did:

I was still under a lot of false illusions about my ex-partner and about how well he took care of them...I didn't find out til many years later he really was a bit negligent in many ways where they were concerned... (Collette, N)

Alice's ex-partner initially denied her access to their son. She felt he was being abused but was shocked at the depth of his reaction when he was returned to her:

My son said, Mum, if I hadn't come to you, I would have killed myself... (Alice, P1)

A particularly strong theme in the women's narratives was the fear they lived with because of their ex-partner's capacity to be a threat to the children's psychological and physical safety, irrespective of the percentage of paternal time:

...he ripped that bag of weapons out of my arms...I called the police when he was at work the next day...I slept on the floor beside our youngest boy and...I always had something beside me. I thought I will kill him if he comes and wants to do us harm. I couldn't imagine that I can...but at the same time...my anxiety and my anger...I think gave me strength...I fear, of course, too, you know, for my son's safety and the whole sanity thing. I'm just not sure...There was a huge relief when he hadn't tried something... (Sally, P1)

He'll snap one day, I just hope he doesn't snap with our daughter. That's my whole issue. Because I honestly believe that he will hurt our daughter to get to me if it got bad enough. He'd gas him and her in the car or something... And, um, but then there's nothing I can do about it. Do you know what I mean? But I still, I mean, the balance is I don't, you know... (Caroline, N)

...he is not a parent's toenail...he really has got no idea and I've got to send the kids there...a worker at the contact centre said to me there are studies where even if there is a bad parent the children are still better off to see them...like my biggest fear in my whole entire being is losing my kids...but you know, it is probably not the biggest, the fear of losing them, it is losing them and not coming back...like them being up there and they are being brainwashed about how bad I am...he tells the kids that they are coming to live with him...he was put into child protection but, so what, nothing happened... (Summer, P2)

Although Wendy's ex-partner drove under the influence of alcohol with the children in the car, his behaviour towards the children and Wendy appeared more ignorant

rather than a concerted hostile pattern of behaviour. This still gave her cause for concern over his parenting style:

...it was difficult to parent with my ex...he didn't believe in positive parenting techniques and rewarding good behaviour and ignoring bad behaviour, for example. That the act was wrong and a naughty thing to do...not that the child was naughty...He picked his son up by his ears...he was often very angry with them and shouted a lot if they misbehaved or didn't keep quiet when he was watching the news.... he was aggressive and swore around the children... not a fun man to be around at all..." (Wendy, N)

Eight women (Virginia, Hayley, Carol, Jessica, Jasmine, Emanon, Jane and Sharni) described private shared parenting arrangements of varying paternal time where their ex-partner took the children without warning and proceeded to deny or restrict the women's access for a period of time. The effect on the children caused the women great distress:

...he has the children now...he undermined me, blamed me and scapegoated me...he got his children to emotionally care-take him...if I go in and remove the girls I am going to lose out with them...going for 50 per cent won't help me with them either... (Jane, N)

...they just didn't turn up...I knew straight away there was something wrong...he kept them for a month and refused to let me see them. He threatened me with all sorts if I tried anything with the police...the children were so affected by it...I am still undoing the damage of that... (Virginia, N)

...he just took them away...they went on holiday...they had never been away from me for so long... (Carol, N)

...I had spoken to them on the phone and he couldn't tell me where they were. [Child] said, you are never coming back, Mummy, you are never coming back...you are just leaving me here forever and ever and ever. And I said, No, that's not true, Daddy won't let me come and get you. Where are you? And he said, I am on a beach. I am on a beach. But he was too little to tell me which beach. And he wouldn't let my oldest son talk to me because he would have been able to tell me...oh, it was dreadful and it took a year after I got my youngest son back for him to speak. He didn't speak for a year. He didn't talk... (Hayley, N)

Thirteen women experienced being stalked by their ex-partners. These were Virginia, Genevieve, Leanne, Jane, Gabrielle, Caroline, Anita, Penny, Sam, Sharni, Summer,

Jessica and Jasmine. Stalking occurred whether there was regular or no paternal time with the children:

He stalked me ...and burnt my house down... (Jessica, P2)

He would do drive-bys...he had his eye on us... (Jane, N)

...he found out where my new partner lived and he'd do blocks around it with the children because he was so obsessed... (Leanne, N)

...my plants would be pulled up, things would go missing, my car was meddled with...my rubbish bin went missing...he lurked...but I couldn't prove this sort of stuff... (Genevieve, N)

The post-separation sexual relationship

...he would call out things like...saggy tits... (Caroline, N)

The women's pre-separation narratives described the violation of their sexual rights, needs and boundaries by their ex-partners, resulting in a loss of intimacy and reciprocity. The women also described various difficulties in restoring their post-separation sexual boundaries with their ex-partners. A range of boundary violations reported by the women post-separation included sexually demeaning attitudes and comments. For the majority of the women it was an underlying tension in the way they felt treated as women and this could escalate into behaviour which denied them sexual respect and sexual independence. For example, the women who felt 'sexually owned' by their partners pre-separation were aware of the possible ramifications of re-partnering.

Eleven of the women experienced intimidating, angry and threatening behaviour when they found new partners (Caroline, Leanne, Genevieve, Virginia, Penny, Jane, Anita, Karly, Alice, Elle and Sharni) irrespective of whether the ex-partner had also re-partnered:

After I told him about my new partner and that we were going to live with him I got a message somewhere in the middle of the night that said, I hope you have lots of glue, and I knew what it meant...he'd taken the dinner set and smashed it...it was the only thing in the house I cared about...it was from my parents and he really didn't like them... (Jane, N)

That was about, I'm so angry with you. I'm going to treat you now like this. I'm going to do this sort of thing and then the guy that I went out with for a while... he paid someone I think to put acid on his car and...that was the end of that relationship... so he was doing that kind of thing... (Karly, N)

...my ex just went crazy...normally every day, every time he picks her up it's abuse...in front of our daughter...I had a boyfriend who had children of his own and my ex just went crazy...my ex used to pick her up from my house quite a bit the way the court orders were then... he just became too abusive...spitting on the car, standing in the street challenging him to a fight so we revisited the orders...but none of that [his behaviour] comes out legally...yet when he had a girlfriend, he moved in with her straight away when our daughter was a baby... (Caroline, N)

The women's experience of their ex-partner's sexually demeaning attitude can be encapsulated in the words of Virginia and Genevieve:

I felt awkward around him, it was the way he looked at me, sized me up, it can be subtle...comments about what I was wearing, how my sex life was, was I less frigid now...you know...putting my sexual self down just the same as ever... (Genevieve, N)

...he put the failure of the relationship down to our sexual life...well, more to me not being sexually responsive. There was no way he could see that I could not respond sexually when I was being treated like that. He said he was treating me like that because I wasn't sexually responsive...he still sees me and treats me like a sexual failure, if you know what I mean...and I am apparently not very attractive now because I am getting older... (Virginia, N)

Jessica and Virginia were raped post-separation:

After my son was born he said to me...you will be coming back to me...you are mine now and you will be having another baby...anytime he got the chance he would rape me...he would turn up and force himself on me...he would stalk me...the police wouldn't help me... (Jessica, P2)

...he was not physically violent...but he knew how to rape...and it happened after we separated and...no...I wouldn't go to the police...I am never ever alone with him now... (Virginia, N)

Sam was raped on the night she left:

The night I left he raped me and I later discovered I was pregnant...when she was about four months old I got a letter from him wanting contact...and I have just fallen apart. What can I do to protect her? (Sam, P2)

Although there were no allegations of sexual abuse of the children by the women in this study, one of the main areas of concern for the women when the children were with their father was the impact on the children of misogynist attitudes:

She was only 10 years old. She came back one weekend and told me all the sadistic things he was doing to her...telling her she was fat...putting small clothes on her because she wanted new clothes... what he'd done to me...he'd done to her... (Elle, P1)

The women's experiences of how they were treated physically and sexually were intertwined and sometimes merged and overlapped completely. The need to have continued economic arrangements with their ex-partner also provided a further site for the women to have their boundaries violated.

Post-separation economic arrangements

He said to me...you're not worth the money and you'll be lucky if you get anything...you will be out there on the road with nothing... (Penny, P2)

The women reported having to restore the loss of economic security and equality from their pre-separation exploitation. However, this was made more challenging because requirements for child support meant a continuing economic relationship between the women and their ex-partners. All the women experienced adversarial and exploitative attitudes towards a financial settlement and the economic contribution to the children.

All the ex-partners refused to contribute equitably to the costs of raising the children and it was suggested by many of the women that one of the main incentives for greater paternal time with the children was the economic benefits of avoiding maintenance. Only Wendy and Collette were paid regular maintenance.

The loss of the family home increased the financial hardship for most of the women post-separation. Hayley, Collette, Jane, Jodie, Sharni, Veronica, Summer, Barbara, Sue, Jessica, Alice, Elle, Sam, Emanon, Penny, Virginia and Genevieve were all

forced to leave the family home and find alternative accommodation with the children. The economic deprivation is apparent within the following quotes:

I had no idea where I was going to live, what I was going to live on...I was absolutely useless because I just...there was nothing...I was pushed and pulled by lawyers...I didn't know what I was doing for a couple of months, I was just absolutely floored...I was functioning but bloody oath I was depressed...I had days where I wandered around in a fog because there was no end goal for the day...you are not leading up to that anxious moment when he walks through the door and whatever, so, yeah... (Penny, P2)

...At that point in time I'm giving up \$150,000 of stuff, my ex-partner got everything. All I had left was the children's stuff and a couple of boxes... (Sharni, P2)

He got an entire house full of stuff...we got nothing. We took three plates, knives, forks, towels...my lawyer said I probably got \$1,500 worth of stuff...second-hand value...and he probably got \$10,000 to \$15,000 worth of gear...I left behind the majority of a two-storey four-bedroomed house contents...there would be weeks when we couldn't afford to put food on the table...he wasn't paying maintenance and now he's arguing that I'm not entitled to a component of superannuation...I walked out with two children...a job and nowhere to go... (Jane, N)

Property settlements proved difficult to negotiate and the majority of women felt that they had not received a just settlement. Jodie, Sebrina and Carol convey the consequences typical for all the women of their ex-partner's attitudes and response to the family's economic needs post-separation:

...he refused to pay. He started refusing, so I had to go to court to put him straight... like, if we didn't get the house sold then it would've been shocking but we, it was like one stage at a time and you couldn't rush it. He didn't come back to do any housework on, gardening, nothing. I did that...Or I paid somebody to do the gardening...So those costs weren't taken into consideration at all...So he's cost me a fortune through doing what he's done...and she's [daughter] gotta really study and she's gotta put up with all this shit...and then, then he frightens her in saying that she...won't be able to...continue school...wasn't prepared to pay her school fees or books or anything. I made him pay... I said, she's your daughter...she adores you...I said, don't be that wicked to do that to her when she's only got two years to go. That's the best years you can give her is an education...for her future... (Jodie, N)

...we had similar jobs...similar pays but I did all the rest of the work...he still persisted in being cruel after he left...if you don't sign the divorce forms you will not receive another cent...he has made it so hard for me and the situation I

am in financially with him is unjust...he has no concern for the well-being of the children...I am working myself into the ground to keep them going the way we used to keep going...he hardly has to pay any maintenance...he will say he loves the children...I say, you love your children so much that you are prepared to drag me down to the point where I can't put a roof over their heads...he can't offer ethical, moral, spiritual guidance and support...the least he can do is offer financial support but there is none of that...and society lets them get away with that... (Sebrina, P2)

...then my daughter turned 16...she felt she could choose [whether she spent the weekend with her father]...and so she said to him she didn't want to go that weekend ,cause she had something she wanted to do with her friends...it was a very brave move...and all hell broke loose...the children were ordered to a meeting...they came back absolutely dumbstruck...they were in fact thrown out of the house...their father didn't admit to Centrelink the girls weren't going and the court order was still in place...so I wasn't getting the money... (Carol, N)

Hayley, Leanne, Jane, Alice and Barbara explain the sort of economic deceit that the majority of the women experienced:

...and we had some more property and he had a little light plane and he was selling everything off and telling the court that he had lost it in bad money deals... (Hayley, N)

Now we have to go to Federal Court. He has never paid maintenance. He intimidated me into signing forms to say we had shared care 50 per cent – this happens in the haze that follows this sort of separation...Centrelink put an exemption on me collecting maintenance from him because it is too dangerous...they will pursue him for fraud if he continues to harass me re the 50 per cent... (Jane, N)

I lost my financial settlement because I said to my ex I'm frightened that our son will suffer if I don't give in to you and he said, yes he will. So I gave up 60/40 per cent...I ended up walking away with virtually nothing because of that threat and then two years later my son's on my doorstep...and I don't get back 20 per cent or whatever... (Alice, P1)

...the ordeal of going through the child support agency for extra maintenance...the paperwork, being summonsed, I had to prove absolutely everything...he didn't have to do anything...he had all the rights... (Leanne, N)

he tried all sorts of things with the property settlement...all sorts of games...I still didn't get any furniture...I got some old clothes, the worst bean bag and a chest of drawers...the stuff was sitting out on the front porch...the only decent thing I got was a set of drawers... he tried all sorts of things with the property settlement about how he had had this heart attack and therefore he wasn't going to live much longer, so he wanted 60 per cent and me only get 40 per

cent... and I fully expect he won't give me the super he owes me... (Barbara, P2)

The women found that their social arrangements, including their working and spiritual life, could also be affected by their ex-partner's behaviour. This was the case for all the women except for those women whose ex-partner moved (Jasmine and Wendy) or who moved away themselves (Emanon and Collette) or had partners who were less hostile (Jodie and Wendy).

Post-separation social arrangements

Socially, I didn't have money, time or energy...and I wasn't sure who I was...and I don't think too many people understood what I had been through and he was so well connected... (Genevieve, N)

In the women's pre-separation narratives most women described a loss of social resources and capital as a result of the web of abuse. All the women mentioned some difficulty in restoring relationships with their friends, or family post-separation. For some, this extended into their entire community.

For some of the women, it was a great effort to restore their social network. They felt deskilled, lacked confidence and encountered further isolation:

I lost all my friends and all my family...he was so derogatory around everyone...and my parents...he would stand over me at [child's hobby] twice a week...I'd be on the ground and no one would help me and it would be in front of the kids...and then he would follow me home (Leanne, N)

I had to totally recreate a social circle...I was stranded by him...everyone either avoided me or thought I was strange... (Virginia, N)

I was scared. I felt like an alien...like I imagine the Sudanese felt when brought here...I had lost all my skills... (Jasmine, P2)

The women explained how their ex-partners limited their ability to create a social network using threats, fear, harassment, stalking, and by refusing to be on time or to honour childcare arrangements. As well, economic insecurity and an overload of the

financial responsibility for raising the children contributed to their isolation. The women's post-separation social arrangements and public portrayal were also intricately interrelated. Defamation of the women pre- and post-separation also led to their alienation socially.

Elle and Sharni give graphic descriptions of how they were socially isolated by defamation:

I couldn't even walk down the street and I felt anxiety attacks. I had to drink something cold to get back up. You know...I couldn't even drive the car. I couldn't even function right or left but I still could function looking after the kids. Somehow that mothering stint came in whereas the other stuff went out so I had to get myself back into me again. You know, all in one...His mum backed him up too...his brother hit me in front of my daughter... and said to my daughter, you'd be better off living with your father...your mother is going to have to rent and you won't be able to have animals... You know, just, I felt isolated from the world...and I'd go down the street and his friends would all give me dirty looks and people that used to talk to me didn't talk to me and every avenue I went to get a rented house in...I'd say he went around every real estate and told them I was no good and I had no proof of who I was. I had no references or anything. I had nothing...he had the children calling me psycho... The kids come back being naughty and saying that I was psycho because his family said I was psycho and he said I was psycho. That kept coming back all the time and I knew I wasn't, you know. I knew I wasn't, but I felt hurt....you could say...emotionally tortured... (Elle, P1)

...[he took the children away] and I cracked. I didn't have the strength to fight again and...to lose my children, it was...and being blamed...and being ridiculed to the public...to lots of people, all of the friends...to the school, the school counsellor and being looked down upon in a few areas... (Sharni, P2)

Sally, Karly and Jane speak of a sense of loneliness and social isolation that came from feeling confused, worried and having difficulty in articulating their concerns:

It was all so unreal and that is something, the memory of this unreality. As if I need to wake up. This is not happening to me. I had my counsellor and [an agency] to go to. I don't know what I would have done without that. I really don't know. I can't even think about that now...There is a fear which I can't even tell my friend, my only friend now, really. I can't say to her, do you know I have a horror before this weekend? Or every time they went camping and my son joyfully goes in there...The camping trip went well but my son is now really strange with me and making excuses for his dad...my son is so different... (Sally,P1)

...but I spent years just being overwhelmed and unsure of what had happened...and not sure of whether...my expectations in the relationship were too much and whether...I had a right to just walk away from that relationship...that things weren't that bad. I just wasn't happy. Now I think, oh, you know, things were pretty horrible and I wouldn't want to be living with a person like that again...But yeah, it's taken years so that's a huge weight. Knowing that by the time you finally work out what's gone on, it's almost too late to support your children in a wiser way... (Karly, N)

I guess one of the things that I've been frightened of is...the girls learning the wrong coping skills. Really...everyone just scratches their heads and thinks, why should you do that, but they don't know him...and they don't know what he's capable of...and I'm the one who has to live with him [parenting] the girls... (Jane, N)

Not only was the women's concern for the children in shared parenting arrangements socially isolating, it further taxed any energy they needed to restore a social life:

Parenting my child in order to get her through contact safely became my life... (Sam, P2)

I knew they [ex-partner and new wife] were going to mess me around with my girls...I was terrified for my girls' lives actually...they would come back from contact distraught...they were terrified a lot over there...they saw the changes in their father...and so it would take a couple of days to heal and then the anxiety about going would set in so that's how it was for five years...it was very difficult...when we were together there was no, apart from family, we didn't interact with any people...we didn't want to leave the house...we became a very isolated little family... 'cause we were in a sort of state of shock...I was a depressed mother...I was so humiliated and devastated...I couldn't even stand up for myself...I could not stand up to those two monsters...the law was not defending me...nothing in this that was put in place was to defend me in any way. I felt vulnerable...I felt absolutely at my wit's end with all of it...you know they were allowed to treat my children as they wanted and come and scream at me, ring me at work...I didn't get fired but they put me off at work...they weren't happy with what was going on with my life...and I wasn't giving them 100 per cent... (Carol, N)

There was a persistent tension in the women's lives about how to educate the children about abuse and violence without breaking down the intimacy between the children and their father, the children and themselves, or being accused of alienating the children from their father. This affected the restoration of a post-separation relationship with their children and it further isolated the women socially because of

the enormity of the problem. Jessica, Sharni, Jane and Amy speak of this tension. Jessica, for example, was scapegoated as the one who was the bad mother despite the fact that she was in a chronically physically violent relationship from which she could not safely extricate herself:

Well, it was a double bind because it was like, do I tell them so they're aware or is that going to damage them psychologically. So I chose to withhold [tears up]...I need a tissue ,cause I've got makeup on now. My eyes are stinging. Oh, hang on...it was last year, and I said okay, this is what he used to do to me and you guys blame me and I laid out some of the things that he used to do and she said, why didn't you ever tell us any of this and I said, how could I? I was protecting you. Psychologically it would have damaged you. I'm starting to tear up now...psychologically; it would have damaged you more...because I tried to judge what was best for them...And I really still don't think if I had told them it would've made much difference, to tell you the truth, because the damage had been done... (Jessica, P2)

You see, there is a fine line between the emotional attachment to their father and them...as children... not understanding what we know as adults, and we can't put it on them... (Sharni, P2)

The fear of these children and their relationship with their dad for me is so difficult to describe...she didn't, doesn't need to know...what I'm going through and what's happening. You know...she needs to know that her dinner's going to be on the table, her clothes are clean and ironed and she's got clean shoes for school...he said one day to my eldest as he was leaving... tell your mum I hope she has a really good life ,cause I'm going home to kill myself ... (Jane, N)

I remember when my son came home crying saying...daddy was sitting on my bed crying because you have stolen all his money...I think yep, you can't report it to anybody. They are not interested... (Amy, N)

Trying to work out how to relate to the children in way that kept them safe but was not at their expense was ongoing, regardless of the level of contributions their ex-partners made to parenting:

If you've initiated it...it's even worse and I think if I could say...your father used to hit me or kick me across the room or something like that, it would've been easier...whether I would've wanted to say it, or if they'd have seen it but whether I would've wanted to say it and scare them...I don't know...but he didn't really. It was just underlying stuff... (Karly, N)

He was virtually saying whatever happens it is not my fault – it is god's will – I was so scared because I could see this made him unsafe to be around...he

wanted our youngest with him. He was so possessive but I couldn't tell my son anything. You know, what do you tell a child...you don't want to worry them but you can't say I don't trust your dad...I am pacing inside myself – what am I going to do...how to communicate with my kids about all this without upsetting them. We have all suffered from the impact of him in our lives and now he is lying... (Sally, P1)

The women found that they were also publically portrayed in an adversarial and defamatory manner by their ex-partner.

Post-separation public portrayal

...he poisoned the kids against me... (Sue, N)

Inaccurate representation of the women to significant others was an experience common to all of the women in this study to a greater or lesser extent. They reported being portrayed in a negative light to their children, friends, family, professionals, mediators, counsellors and lawyers. For some of the women, this also extended to the community in which they lived. It resulted in the women losing some social validation and support.

Public defamation was particularly difficult for the women whose partners had strong support from friends, family, and the community. This was the case for Virginia, Genevieve, Gabrielle, Amy, Collette, Sue, Leanne, Elle, Sally, Anita, Sebrina, and Jodie. Conversely, where the women's partners were actually known to be physically violent, have a mental disorder, have gambled the family's money, be promiscuous or have drug and alcohol problems, it sometimes, but not always, indicated to others the possible difficulties this posed for the women and led to some support. This was the case for Jane, Wendy, Barbara and Emanon.

Wendy's partner was a chronic alcoholic and had behaved irresponsibly within the marriage. However, he still defamed Wendy to his friends and family, and they supported him:

He didn't like, I mean it was my fault and look what I'd done to the children so I was very much a bitch to them all...I'd done it all...I mean I'd left so therefore

I'd made the kids unhappy. I'd made him unhappy. I'd made his mother sick in the guts...I had a house and I was a bitch because I'd spent his money and I was sitting pretty. I felt a huge sense of grief and loss after the separation. It was the loss of a dream and a future for my family...I quite quickly started to grow again once I got out of that doom and gloom...but I was so worried as to how he could look after the children and whether he would drink and drive...(Wendy, N)

Many of the women were defamed by their ex-partners as being unfit mothers, for causing trouble or having a questionable character:

He claimed I was an unfit mother in court papers...he wrote 10 reasons why I was an unfit mother. Some were just ludicrous...I had to reply to every one. In the end I got custody partly by default – he didn't want the responsibility and when he did have them he didn't look after them well... (Collette, N)

My son used to come to me and say, dad reckons you didn't answer the phone last week cause you were at all your boyfriend's...Oh, and that I was mad and a bitch and so on, and I used to just listen to him and let him get it off his chest and I never ever, the only thing I'd say at the very end of all the put downs...Don't listen too much to what people say...watch what they do...I went to the small claims court to get my piano back [from my ex] for my son. My ex and his new partner wrote a letter that stated that my son was emotionally and physically abused by me and that he was under threat of suicide...how bad a mother I was...I lost the case and I was devastated...and I just gave up you know... he also claimed I was an unfit mother and that I was mental, when I took my son out of school for a year and home-schooled him because he was being bullied... (Alice, P1)

...to lose the children...and being blamed and being ridiculed to the public...he went around to lots of people...all of the friends...the school, the school counsellor...being looked down upon... (Sharni, P2)

The psychologist wrote me up as alienating the children from the father...his new partner was a sensible woman who is used as a scapegoat, I was this vivacious mother and my ex-partner was this poor and saddened father...and then a few months ago I met one of his work mates and she said, [Anita] for two or three years he was complaining about how you would ring him up and demand things of him, and I said, but I didn't ring him and demand things of him...she said, he used to go around telling everyone that, and I thought...how can he hate me so much? (Anita, P1)

My ex told my boyfriend's ex-partner I was a social climber and I wanted my boyfriend for his money. He didn't have any money but my ex didn't realise that...you know just things like that...I am a slut... I sleep around with men. It's just not true. (Caroline, N)

Despite the fact that Barbara's partner was one of the most violent and abusive in this study, she alone of all the women was able to achieve some disruption to post-separation defamation herself by asking her partner to take responsibility for his behaviour before her well-planned exit:

I said, I want you to do something for our son...I want you to sit down and tell him...I want you to apologise to him for what you put us through for the last 23 years. He said, why? I said, for our son...I think he needs to hear that...if you say you are sorry to me...he needs to hear that too. For goodness sake, it all fell into place. He came in, my son was sitting down, and he just said to him...your mum is leaving. My son said... I know, dad. She has every reason to, because you have been a fucking bastard. My husband said, yes, I know. I have treated your mother appallingly. She's been a wonderful mum. My son said, I know, dad...see, I wanted that to happen because I wanted the healing to start before I left...I could not have done that years before. I just could not have done that...I pulled up at the house [where she moved to] and I just sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. But you know...they weren't tears of sadness...I have not felt that free for so long. That sense of freedom was just, oh, it was wonderful. Just wonderful...I knew where the blame lay. My kids knew where the blame lay...I needed to move on... (Barbara, P2)

The only woman who encountered professional intervention that interrupted the post-separation blame and defame cycle was Sam. Sam's ex-partner blamed her for their daughter refusing contact. A psychologist explained to him that he was the one driving the wedge between himself and his daughter:

...in the end the psychologist called him in and said, do you want a relationship with your daughter or not? He said yes...and she goes, well, you are losing her. You are doing perfectly well...the more you abuse her and her mother and her mother's family...the more you will lose her... (Sam, P2)

The extent and success of the blame and defame cycle, particularly on the children, directly increased the sense of alienation and fear for the mother. It represented a threat to the women's ability to reclaim themselves, achieve independence, and legal legitimacy as well. If the women remained silenced because of lack of intervention of any kind, and were alienated and isolated, their capacity to reclaim their lives was severely affected. This is best portrayed by the words of Collette, who has been separated for 33 years:

My personal individual life...no, it has never got back on track...for 30 years I have been copping stuff from my child, and my family holds me accountable for

the failure of the relationship...they don't see it as emotional abuse. I have felt so guilty for so long... (Collette, N)

The women in this study experienced the web of abuse, as outlined in Chapter Four, as extending into their post-separation lives. For each woman, there was a particular time prior to interview where different elements of this web were more noticeable than others. For all the women, however, their ex-partner's attitudinal and behavioural style created adversarial communication patterns which prevented the negotiation of all post-separation issues. There was also an economic cost to all the women because of this style. Similarly, the women all experienced a cost to their own and/or their children's sense of safety, autonomy and well-being. Sexually, the web of abuse post-separation was seen in the misogynist and demeaning attitudes and put-downs encountered by the women. Socially, the women were affected by a loss of safety and economic security, and isolated by defamation or a lack of understanding for their position post-separation.

The web of abuse extended into the women's lives in different ways and at different times. For some women, irrespective of whether the web of abuse included the experience of physical violence, it was more intense and entrapping. For example, Cassandra, Caroline, Amy, Jane, Gabrielle, Genevieve, Virginia, Hayley, Sue, Carol and Leanne did not experience physical violence but were completely entrapped within a web of abuse with no possibility of it being disrupted. They described their ex-partners as highly hostile towards them. Hayley, Sue, Carol and Leanne had children over 18 at the time of interview and were still highly affected by their experiences. Elle, Sally, Anita, Penny, Sharni, Summer, Sebrina, Emanon, Jessica and Jasmine did experience physical violence and similarly experienced an intense and entrapping web of abuse until their ex-partners either withdrew or were legally prevented from further contact.

The ex-partners of Lola Lucia, Karly, Sam and Jodie kept a lower profile in the women's lives post-separation as time went on. Collette moved, Wendy's partner

moved and Barbara's partner apologised. Veronica's children were older and more independent at the time of separation.

Figure 3 at the end of this chapter shows the findings of this chapter as an additional layer to the web of abuse presented in Chapter Four. It summarises the post-separation experiences of the women and conveys how these were a post-separation expression of the attitudinal and behavioural style of their ex-partners within each aspect of their relationship. The three types of boundary violations have been merged with double standards, double binds and a lack of empathy, as these are all the outcome of the central core of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes.

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

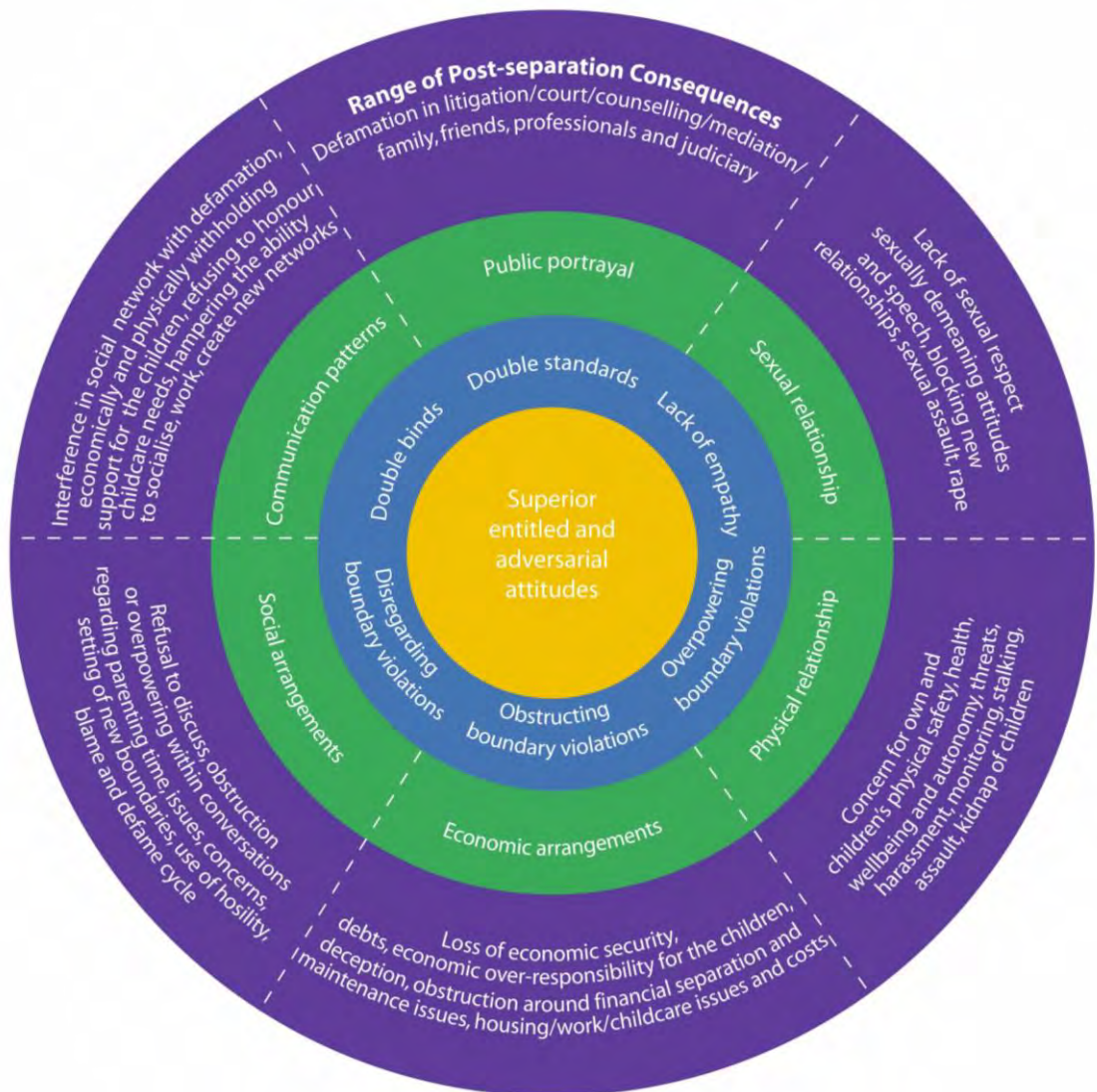
This chapter has built a further layer on to the story of domestic violence as told by the women in this study. The centrality of the dynamics of their relationship irrespective of physical violence has emerged as a consistent theme in the women's lives, both during their relationship and post-separation. This chapter articulated how the web of abuse that was described in Chapter Four extended into the women's post-separation lives. The women recounted how their ex-partner's attitudinal and behavioural style created an adversarial approach to parenting time with the children. The women described an unrelenting demand to adapt to their ex-partner's needs and wants at the expense of their own needs and those of the children. They experienced adversarial, hostile attitudes and the use of a blame and defame cycle in order to deflect responsibility and prevent the successful negotiation of issues. The core attitudes also created a post-separation constellation of double standards and double binds which trapped the women into no win situations in their shared parenting arrangements.

These attitudes also created a behavioural style which ensured the extension of the web of abuse into the women's entire post-separation life. This was achieved by a post-separation pattern of boundary violations, which created obstacles to the restoration of their lives irrespective of the amount of paternal time or responsibility

their ex-partner had with the children. The women had different experiences of the post-separation web of abuse. It could be more visible and intense in some aspects of the women's lives and at certain times than others. The potential of the web to keep the women trapped and continued to be denied equality, reciprocity and accountability was disrupted for some women and enhanced for others.

The following chapter discusses the findings reported in the three data chapters and how they contribute to and extend the research and knowledge base introduced in the literature review.

Figure 3: A Post-separation Web of Abuse I



Chapter Seven: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the three data chapters of this study and how they interrelate. It also locates the findings within the relevant research and literature.

In this study, the research question was asked, ‘In a context of domestic violence, how do women experience post-separation shared parenting arrangements?’ Although the women I interviewed had been separated for at least two years, they had remained linked to their ex-partners by a range of post-separation parenting arrangements. Of these thirty women, only 14 had reported physical violence from their partner. This enabled an exploration of how the women perceived their relationships irrespective of physical violence. The women’s stories pointed to the symbiotic relationship between the women’s experience of shared parenting and the commonality of dynamics underlying their pre-separation experiences.

The purpose of this discussion is threefold. First, it is to note where the research findings of the three data chapters resemble the research cited in the corresponding sections of the literature review. For example, I note the resemblance to the research on the nature of abuse, the impact of abuse and post-separation shared parenting issues and draw links between each body of knowledge.

However, the significant findings of the study relate more to how we understand abuse and how that relates to the post-separation phase when this includes post-separation shared parenting. Therefore the second purpose of this discussion is to focus on how each data chapter interrelates. The results of this study are used to build, in three stages, a conceptual model of domestic violence based on the dynamics that underpinned the women’s experience of abuse. Three visual representations of the links and relationship between the different forms of abuse is presented and discussed with reference to the impact on the women and their post separation shared parenting issues.

The third purpose of this discussion is to present a conceptual model of domestic violence which is based on the processes of colonisation. I remained concerned that describing domestic violence as a particular configuration of forms of abuse does not adequately represent the subtleties and diversity of the women's experiences.

The results of this study suggest that the abuse experienced by the women both before and after separation is best understood as a process of colonisation. Drawing parallels between the web of abuse to a process of colonisation avoids fragmenting the women's experiences and suggests the nature and extent of the phenomenon currently referred to as domestic violence. It illustrates the total immersion as well as the entrapment of the women in the process, despite their resistance. The different forms of abuse that are consistently referred to in definitions of domestic violence can be seen as those aspects of the relationship where colonising attitudes and behaviours manifest. It is explained why this may not include incidents of physical or sexual violence.

Using an analogy of colonisation to conceptualise domestic violence avoids a reliance on incidents or events to prove it. Rather, colonisation can be seen in the concrete examples of denial of full citizenship conferred on the women in every aspect of their life. The idea of colonisation also illuminates the obstacles to achieving restoration and independence whilst extricating themselves from the 'colonial rule' and neglect inherent in post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

A Commonality of Dynamics

Many of the women in this study voiced strong objections about and confusion over the minimisation and lack of standardisation for psychological abuse and emotional abuse in their relationships. The consequences of this lack of standardisation and language was clearly evident in the women's struggle to identify even for themselves, let alone to clearly convey to others, what they had experienced with their partners. The women had a better understanding of physical, sexual, economic, verbal and social abuse but the relationship between these forms of abuse was vague for them. It

was important to the women to understand the links and to define the role of emotional and psychological abuse in the pattern of their relationships.

The initial focus in the trauma, child abuse or domestic violence literature was to clarify and standardise the meaning and effects of physical and sexual abuse in order to respond to the seriousness of these issues as they came to light. The multitude of terms currently used to describe abuse which is non-physical is perhaps a reflection of the struggle to clarify and standardise the less tangible aspects of abuse. The non-physical aspects of domestic violence have often been framed up as psychological and emotional abuse. For example, the terms emotional and psychological abuse/maltreatment/violence, non-physical contact abuse, verbal and symbolic violence are often used interchangeably (McKinnon, 2008). In the research presented in the literature review, the relationship of psychological to emotional abuse was unclear, particularly with reference to domestic violence, because of the lack of universal standardisation in defining the terms.

In 1995, O'Hagen challenged the use of these terms as synonymous or interchangeable in the child abuse literature. Yet the domestic violence research has been slower to successfully undertake the difficult task of demarcating the boundaries between the terms and the relationship of one to the other. Testimony to this is the fact that emotional abuse was described as a form of domestic violence and psychological domination was clearly referred to in the broad definition of domestic violence agreed upon at the Australian 1997 National Domestic Violence Summit, but in the *Tasmanian Family Violence Act 2004*, the definition of domestic violence did not refer to psychological abuse at all. The term emotional abuse is used to name an offence and verbal abuse appears to be considered part of emotional abuse, but psychological abuse is not mentioned. Legal definitions for the purpose of defining behaviour that is against the law are not likely to be able to adequately embrace the totality of women's experience of domestic violence.

Both emotional and psychological abuse has a history of being researched in connection with physical violence in a very one-dimensional fashion. For example,

the emphasis has been on whether they, preceded, accompanied or co-existed with physical violence, and they tended to be treated as if they were episodic forms of abuse. I found that the women's stories refuted such one-dimensional connections with physical violence and were more in line with those researchers who consider emotional abuse or psychological abuse as at the core of physical and sexual abuse (McGee & Wolfe, 1991).

The experience of physical or sexual violence for the women in this study, for example, was often a premeditated or spontaneous event that could not be linked to any particular interaction. Assault could occur when the women were busy, distracted, contented, sick or asleep. This belies the notion of such a simplistic relationship between violence to psychological or emotional abuse and the inference of interactional problems within the relationship. Emotional and psychological abuse was an ever-present force in the relationship rather than being linked to an incident of physical violence.

Although it was established by the mid-1990s that emotional and psychological abuse existed independently of physical abuse rather than merely as risk factors for violent behaviour, there is little research that describes the dynamics of domestic violence as a whole, or indeed the similarity of the non-physical components of domestic violence between women who had experienced physical violence and those who had not. There is even less research linking post-separation difficulties to pre-separation dynamics, irrespective of physical violence.

My findings indicated that there was a striking similarity of dynamics irrespective of physical violence. These were a core of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes which created an inevitable constellation of double standards and double binds as well as a pattern of boundary violations. These dynamics underpinned each woman's physical and sexual relationship with her partner but did not necessarily include physical violence or sexual assault in terms that match legal criteria. Whereas it would seem plausible to speculate that physical violence or sexual assault, even if occasional, would reinforce the emotional and psychological abuse, it seemed that the

women who did not report physical violence or sexual assault in a manner which was a chargeable offence were equally, if not more terrified of their partner than the women who were able to report this.

Themes of domination and control, typical to women in all the domestic violence research that used physical violence as an indicator, were present to the same degree and in the same way in my sample of women who did not experience physical violence. This raises the possibility that physical violence is not a reliable indicator of domestic violence but one of the more obvious symptoms. The implications of this assume even greater significance for understanding the women's post-separation experiences and the obstacles to restoring their lives.

Other than physical violence, there were many other symptoms of a core of dominating attitudes. These were illustrated as a pattern of double standards, double binds and boundary violations in the couple's physical and sexual relationship, their economic and social arrangements, their communication patterns and their public portrayal. The post-separation experiences of the women were better understood when physical violence was considered as just one form of boundary violation in the physical relationship between the couple.

Core attitudes

Anderson et al. (1991) view the patterns of psychological maltreatment as risk factors for violent behaviour rather than as risk factors for the women themselves, yet draw links between psychological maltreatment as a form of mind control, brainwashing and the psychological coercion and deception found in religious or political cults. The literature on psychological abuse also draws parallels with the experience of being a hostage, the victim of a capture crime or a prisoner of war.

This reflects the experience of the women in my study, of being owned rather than related to. There was a sense in the data of being hostage to their partners, irrespective of the experience of physical violence. Chang (1996) also notes in her research on psychological abuse that the women described their partners as

functioning more like a parent or a controlling boss or a dictator than an emotionally connected partner.

Bancroft and Silverman (2002), Jenkins (1990) and Chang (1995) believe that the single most critical concept to understanding the battering mentality is the overarching attitudinal characteristic of entitlement. Bancroft (2002, p. 332), for example, writes: 'The abusive mentality is the mentality of oppression'. He conceptualises abuse as a tree, 'growing from attitudes and values, not feelings. The roots are ownership, the trunk is entitlement and the branches are control' (Bancroft, 2002, p. 75).

A core of ownership, entitlement and control is reflected strongly in my findings. This research outlines a core of attitudes that I found were central to the women's experiences. These were the superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes that gave rise to behaviour towards the women that was underpinned by a matrix of double standards and double binds and was relentlessly violating of their boundaries. Isolating these attitudes has some support in the literature on domestic violence. I came to the same conclusion as Bancroft and Silverman (2002) who suggest that the overarching behavioural characteristic of the men they worked with was the imposition of a pattern of control over their partners. They describe how this control is maintained by the use of tactics such as criticism, verbal abuse, economic control, isolation and cruelty. I describe this as a pattern of boundary violations, derived from the overarching attitudinal characteristic of entitlement, which correlates closely to the findings of Bancroft and Silverman (2002).

Adversarial attitudes and their consequences for the entire relationship are not noted in the research, yet describe an important component of the women's experience in this study. The unremitting desire of their partners to win and be right explains why, despite great efforts, the women were unable to effect change within the pre- or post-separation relationship.

Core behaviours

The findings of this study indicate that the core attitudes held by the women's partners create a relentless pattern of behaviours that disregard, obstruct or overpower their rights, needs or boundaries. I describe this as a concerted pattern of boundary violations.

As opposed to psychological abuse, emotional abuse is more likely to be defined as particular behaviours. However, many of the studies on psychological and emotional abuse describe behaviours which I classify as disregarding, obstructing or overpowering of the women's rights, needs, concerns, or boundaries.

Commonly, certain behaviours have been listed as constituting psychological abuse. For example, amongst other behaviours Sonkin et al. (1985) list explicit and implicit threats of violence, pathological jealousy, Nicarthy (1986) lists isolation and enforcement of trivial demands and Walker (1984) describes social and financial isolation and verbal harassment. Additionally, Chang (1995) suggests that the following five interaction patterns occur within a psychologically abusive relationship: complimentary schismogenesis (adapt to me), double binds, direct verbal attack, silence and withdrawal, and lack of emotional connection.

These all bear direct resemblance to the core behaviours to which I refer. Chang also surmises that psychological abuse grows out of a male sense of entitlement to a position of dominance and control. Her version of psychological abuse is that it encompasses perfectionist demands, economic and sexual domination, social isolation and humiliation. Her aim, however, is not to conceptualise the dynamics of domestic violence but to establish the existence of psychological abuse as being independent of physical abuse. Yet Chang's findings are similar to my research findings in that such interactions were not episodic occurrences but rather permeated the entire relationship.

The core behaviours to which I refer also have some similarity with Kirkwood's (1993) research on emotional abuse. Kirkwood, like myself, interviewed women who

had experienced physical violence and those who had not. In the same way that I describe a web of abuse, Kirkwood describes a web of emotional abuse made up of six components, namely degradation, fear, objectification, deprivation, overburden of responsibility and distortion of subjective reality. These components are all overlapping and interrelated. She states that these are entrapping and have post-separation implications. Her research, like mine, points to the overlapping and interrelated components of emotional abuse and links this to other areas of the women's lives and their post-separation experiences. Kirkwood also found similarities between the dynamics experienced by both groups of women. Whereas Kirkwood was not attempting to explore the interrelationships between forms of domestic violence, her conceptualisation of emotional abuse irrespective of physical violence provides direct implications for domestic violence.

The existing research on emotional abuse reveals a process of entrapment and losing power. Ferraro and Johnson (1983) studied 'an emotional career of victimisation' that is not synonymous with physical assault. Hirigoyen (1998) refers to it as 'a seizure of power' phase in emotional abuse.

The continuous nature of the process of losing power, as noted by Smith, Tessaro and Earp (1995), the process of entrapment referred to by Landenburger, (1993) and the gradual process of victimisation described by Mills (1985) all challenge the prevailing view that the women's choice is to simply leave or stay. They draw attention to a process of subjugation and its effects, as opposed to any inherent quality of the women who found themselves in such a situation.

Walker's (1984) study developed the terms Battered Women's Syndrome and Learned Helplessness, which are criticised for explaining the conduct of the women rather than the conduct of their partners. It seems that these terms overlook the dynamics of the relationship that ensured defeat of the women's attempts for independence.

Fear

The lack of research on domestic violence on women from non-violent samples reflects the difficulties in defining the role of non-physical violence and the level of fear that warrants acknowledgement as domestic violence in the absence of physical violence. These difficulties are represented in Bancroft and Silverman's (2002) working definition of domestic violence and Kirkwood's (1993) description of the sample of women in her study. For example, Bancroft and Silverman's definition does not require the presence of beatings, but it does require that there 'at least be actions clearly intended as threats, such as raising of fists, cutting phone lines or deliberately dangerous driving, as the presence of fear dramatically intensifies the effects of psychological abuse' (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, p. 3). They explain that 'the emotional sequela of name calling is more debilitating if punctuated by periodic physical assault'. (Bancroft, 2002, p. 3). Kirkwood (1993) describes the women in her study as 'severely terrorised' without the use of physical violence.

An implication of using fear as an indicator is that psychological abuse alone may not cause enough fear. Kirkwood's assertion that her sample of women was 'severely terrorised' conveys both the level of fear possible without the use of physical violence, and her need to focus on fear itself if there is no physical violence. I suggest this reflects the struggle in the literature to come to terms with the definition and effect of the less tangible aspects of domestic violence, whether this is framed up as incipient control, coercive control or psychological and emotional abuse.

The findings of this research suggest that an apparent lack of fear does not necessarily reflect an absence of either abuse or a power differential. Many of the women in my study did not realise how scared they were of their partner until they wanted to leave. Had they been interviewed prior to this time they would not and could not have acknowledged their fear of their partner. It was often in retrospect that they could recognise and even articulate their level of fear. This was particularly the case when they did not experience physical violence and were not socially encouraged to regard their relationship as abusive.

Given the links drawn between psychological maltreatment to mind control, coercion and deception by Anderson et al. (1991), for example, it is difficult to imagine psychological maltreatment not being frightening even in the absence of physical violence, when such links are made. The fear of psychological and emotional domination that is not punctuated by incidents, even if rare, of reportable physical violence, is not well understood. Fear for one's life because of the hostility and lack of empathy from their partners, as well as the potential for their partners to use other methods of inflicting pain or misery than physical violence, seemed to suggest to the women the potential and likelihood for their psychological and physical annihilation. An additional focus is the extent to which a woman's life chances are reduced because of living with a partner who uses psychological abuse.

A Pattern of Boundary Violations

In the literature review, all the behavioural tactics that were either posited as psychological or emotional abuse, or presented as the experiences of women in domestic violence, fall into one of the three categories of boundary violations that I propose. The majority of them fall into the overpowering category, in that the behaviours described were overpowering of the women's needs, wants, concerns, rights and boundaries.

However, Tolman (1992) indicates that psychological abuse is on a continuum, with behaviours listed on one end that could be considered disregarding, such as withdrawing momentarily or listening unempathically, and behaviours listed at the other end which could be considered overpowering. Loring (1997) notes that emotional abuse could be both overt and covert. These researchers indicate their understanding that not all abuse is overt, obvious or overpowering.

In addition to the possibility of a continuum of abuse, or covert and overt abuse, I found that what differentiates the aspects of the core behavioural style is not just an increasing severity of abuse but rather the ways in which the women's needs, wants, concerns, rights or boundaries were treated by their partners. For example, sometimes

the women were treated with indifference, which the women described as just as abusive as having their boundaries overpowered by physical force or deception. Classifying the behaviours in terms of how the women's needs, rights and boundaries are treated allows domestic violence to be understood as a pattern of boundary violations that is symptomatic of particular attitudes, rather than random incidents of the more overt behaviours traditionally recognised as being abusive.

Chang (1995) refers to the use of silence, withdrawal and a lack of emotional connection as interaction patterns within psychologically abusive relationships. The Duluth model draws attention to the use of denial, minimising and trivialising. My classification of these behaviours is that they are disregarding of women's boundaries.

Chang (1995) also refers to men's 'charming but phony' way of being appealing and likeable to others in order to gain recognition or support for their view of themselves, despite humiliating their wives in public. Bancroft and Silverman (2002) in their descriptions of 'battering' behaviour note charm along with blame and consistent attempts to undermine any efforts at independence. Such use of charm and blame I categorise as an obstructive behaviour, as it is used to counter the women by winning them over in order to get their own way. Or it could be used to win other people over at the expense of their partner's viewpoint.

This research found that the women experienced an intense use of self-pitying behaviours and expressions of victimisation from their partners. This does not feature in earlier research, yet is one of the strongest themes in this study. The use of self-pity and victimisation, along with charm and blame, obstructed the women's attempts to hold their partner accountable. It is a way of deflecting responsibility on to the women or elsewhere. These behaviours obstructed the women's needs and prevent any real negotiation or evolution of intimacy within the relationship.

The types of overpowering boundary violations illustrated in the data in this study are well documented in the literature but are not necessarily seen as part of an intricate

pattern of different types of boundary violations. It is the way these boundary violations work in concert within the relationship that creates the chronic as opposed to episodic nature of abuse. They also give rise to the pattern and capacity for coercive control.

The women's experience with their partners was like living within an impenetrable web of these types of interactions which deflected responsibility from the men and in some way engineered the women's compliance and accommodation. When seen in this way, the obstacles that the women all encountered in restoring their lives post-separation can be more easily understood.

Double standards

The importance of double standards has not featured prominently within research on non-physical abuse or domestic violence. They are implied within the explanations of 'battering behaviour' by those who work in the field but they have not been elucidated by women interviewed in a qualitative and open style. Bancroft and Silverman (2002) explain from their work with batterers that entitlement is the belief that one has special rights and privileges without accompanying reciprocal responsibilities (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, p. 8) and that a man's sense of entitlement can lead to double standards, 'such as the belief that he can have outside sexual relationships but that it is not acceptable for his partner to do so' (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, p. 8). Whereas the assumption could then be made that double standards permeate the entire relationship where there is a sense of entitlement, Bancroft and Silverman do not elaborate.

The findings from this research expand on and clarify a constellation of double standards as experienced by the participants. These are a vital aspect of the dynamics and their presence and effects can be traced throughout the entire relationship. This constellation prevented equality, autonomy and agency for the women. Much of the women's confusion and sense of injustice in their relationships can be traced to the presence of situational or entrenched double standards held by their partners, which were always to the women's disadvantage. These were not always identified by the

women themselves despite the powerful impact they had on the quality of the relationship and the women's well-being.

Double binds

The chronic presence of double binds in the lives of the women in this study does not feature strongly in the existing research on non-physical abuse or indeed domestic violence. Yet the centrality of and consequences for the women of living within the web of double binds woven by their partner's contradictory attitudes and expectations are clear for the women in this study.

This raises an issue that was raised by Chang's notion of double binds. She states that double binds are one of the five interaction patterns that threaten the self, arguing that for a relationship to be psychologically abusive only three or more patterns had to exist. Her ideas on double binds are based on Bateson's 52 year-old 'double bind hypothesis'. He argues that irresolvable communicational conundrums in families caused or promoted schizophrenia (Gibney, 2006, p. 48). Bateson explains that although double binds are pivotal they are only one type of complex family interaction (Gibney, 2006, p. 51). His focus was on double binds as conflicting messages or injunctions rather than contradictory expectations and assumptions arising from a sense of entitlement.

In this research, a constellation of double binds is a fundamental and pervasive outcome of the core attitudinal style of the women's partners. Each woman was trapped by the contradictory expectations that are the inevitable outcome of a sense of entitlement. This pervaded the entire relationship, rather than being one of five possible 'interaction' patterns. A sense of entitlement led to contradictory expectations as well as messages. Neither Chang nor Bateson describe double binds in relation to domestic violence, although my suggestion based on the research findings is that a pattern of double binds are fundamental to the dynamics of domestic violence.

Linking the forms of abuse

The focus of this research was not on the definitions of abuse so much as exploring the links between and the effects of the pre-separation relationship on the women's post-separation shared parenting experiences, irrespective of physical violence. However, the core attitudinal and behavioural style outlined in Chapter Four bears some relationship to the research on psychological and emotional abuse. It became clear that these attitudes and behaviours were central to the women's experiences and would therefore logically reverberate throughout their entire relationship.

Although the intent to dominate may not be conscious, the core attitudinal style appears to affect the ability and desire to relate in a non-oppressive manner. The consequences of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes were intrusive and debilitating to the women's mental autonomy in the relationship. Such attitudes demolished respect for the women's existing boundaries, no matter how weak or healthy these were at the time they met their partners. They also demolished respect for the women's attempts to create new boundaries once the relationship was established and to maintain some sense of self-sovereignty.

In addition, these attitudes result in the expectation that the women would revolve around their partners. They had to conform to their partner's standards but not depend on them for their own needs to be met in the relationship. The women were expected to be accommodating and to take care of their partners physically, sexually and emotionally but these expectations were not reciprocated. They explained how they were defined and had their notion of reality defined in relation to their partner's expectations.

This attitudinal style is the common link I detected between all the incidents of abuse. It explains why, for the women in this study, the experience of abuse from their partners was not an incident/injury phenomenon but primarily a quest for achieving and maintaining psychological domination. Any resistance from the women was overridden in their partner's continual quest to maintain or regain superiority within the relationship. The presence of these attitudes I would suggest are psychologically

dominating, and therefore psychologically abusive. Although these attitudes do not necessarily result in physical violence, they increase the likelihood of treating the women in particular ways.

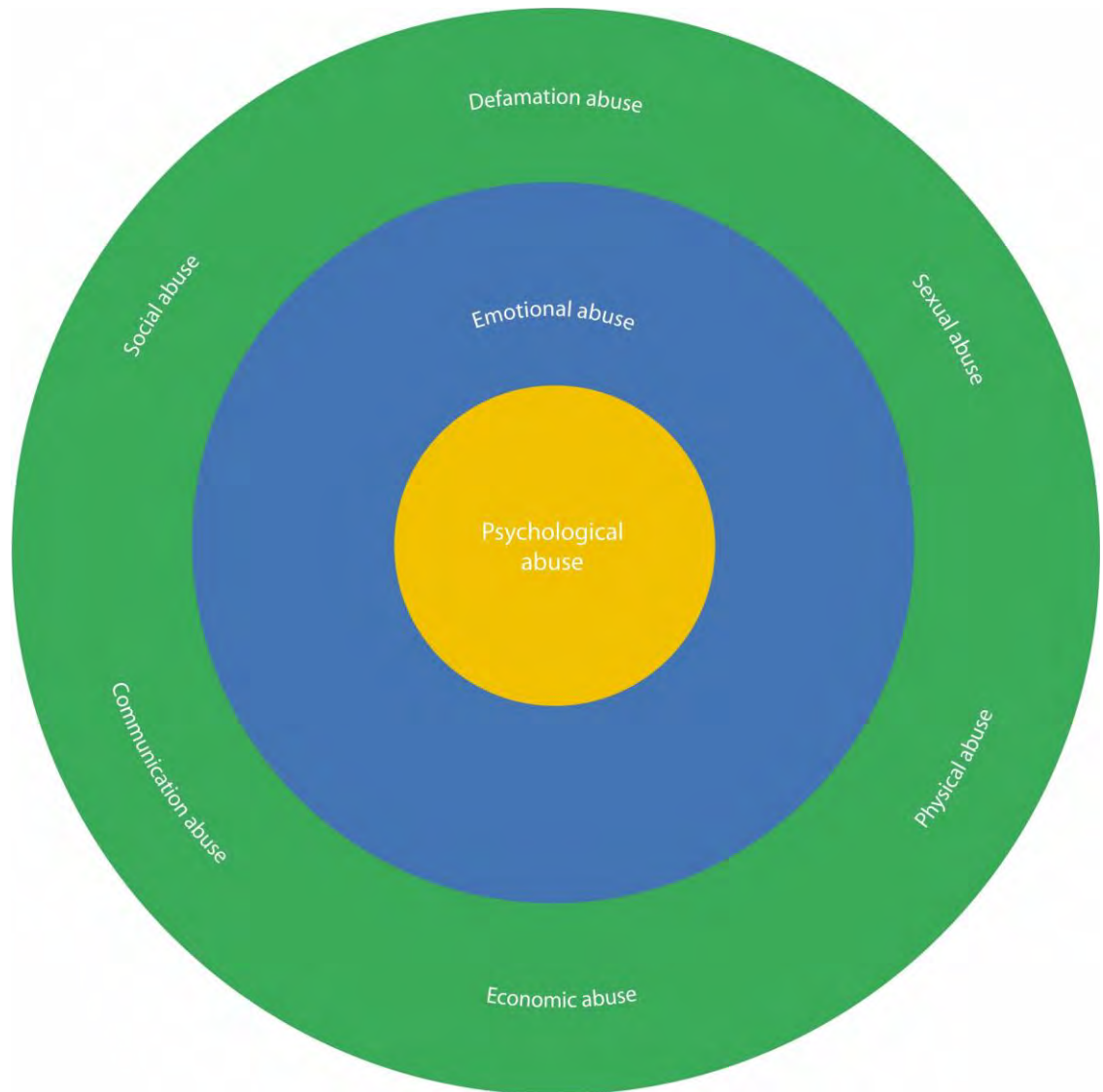
I also found that although there was a marked variation between the behaviours experienced by the women from their partners, underlying all of them is a particular behavioural style. The effects of this style can be traced in the women's descriptions of their economic and social arrangements, their physical and sexual relationship, their communication patterns and public portrayal. It is feasible to link this overall behavioural style, characterised by a pattern of double standards, double binds and boundary violations, and in particular a lack of empathy, with emotional abuse. In the women's lives, I suggest an emotionally abusive behavioural style to be the enactment of psychologically dominating and abusive attitudes.

Figure 4, on the following page, presents one way of reflecting the women's experience of living with their partner. It suggests a particular relationship between each form of abuse characteristically included in definitions of domestic violence. Psychological abuse (superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes) is portrayed as central to every other form of abuse. It was enacted in the women's lives by a pattern of boundary violations, a lack of empathy, and a constellation of double standards and double binds. I consider all of these as underlying the types of behaviour that has been termed emotional abuse in the literature. The centrality of psychological and emotional abuse is reflected within each aspect of the relationship and resulted in physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, social abuse and defamation abuse. The women in this study, in effect, lived within a web of abuse.

Whereas the notion of a web implies being trapped, as the women in this study indicated they were, the border lines delineating the six main aspects of the relationship have been removed in this figure to give the impression of a 'sea of abuse'. In other words, the women's stories conveyed the experience of domestic violence as being both trapped and immersed within a complex interrelationship

between many forms of abuse. This left no part of the women's lives untouched and they experienced a layer or level of each form of abuse as a result.

Figure 4: A Web of Abuse II



A web of abuse

In this research, the women's narratives indicate that they were not only blocked from making effective changes within their relationships, they were also trapped. They

existed within a web of abuse from which it was very difficult to extricate themselves and be independent. This was because of the chronic and complex nature of the dynamics of the relationship.

A confusion common to all the women was that although their experience of being in a relationship was of being dominated and trapped, they were not sure if they had experienced all the different forms of abuse. The findings of this research suggest the core attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners ensured that all the forms of abuse were experienced to some degree. However, this was not always in a manner that the women identified as matching current conceptualisations or legal criteria for these forms of abuse. For example, if the women equated sexual abuse with rape, they were unaware that the full range of double standards, double binds and boundary violations they endured in the sexual relationship with their partner also denied them sexual equality and were abusive.

It may be a practical function legally and for research purposes to demarcate the boundaries between each form of abuse, but the reality of these women's lives with their partners demonstrated that these boundaries would be so highly permeable as to be experientially nonexistent. Thus I have portrayed their lives as a web or sea of abuse.

Conceptualising domestic violence as a web of abuse has some support in the literature. The Duluth Model does not refer to psychological abuse but to the hub of the wheel of abuse as power and control, which is retained by the use of particular strategies permeating their economic and social arrangements, and communication patterns. Kirkwood (1993) does not directly refer to psychological abuse in her representation of emotional abuse but she uses the concept of a web to indicate the interrelatedness of the aspects of emotional abuse.

Stark (2007) proposes that women are trapped by psychological subjugation, which results in certain strategies such as violence, intimidation, isolation, humiliation, exploitation and the micromanagement of everyday life that he likens to the bars of a

cage. There are distinct similarities in all these efforts to conceptualise the dynamics of domestic violence and the relationship of the forms of abuse to one another.

Australian family therapist Laurie McKinnon (2008, p. 2) states that most physical and sexual violence encompasses forms of verbal and emotional abuse. She goes on to cite references depicting psychological maltreatment as a core component in most forms of child abuse and domestic violence. She depicts verbal abuse, however, as being the tip of the iceberg of emotional abuse and in some instances psychological abuse. She grapples with the difficulty of conceptualising the relationship between emotional, psychological and verbal abuse and portrays them as overlapping.

Verbal abuse becomes emotional abuse when it continues over time and has the potential to negatively affect the target person's emotional development and behaviour. Emotional abuse becomes psychological abuse when it continues over a prolonged period of time, incorporates a power differential and has the potential to erode the target person's sense of self and social competence (McKinnon, 2008, p.12).

Although there are similarities between McKinnon's conceptualisation and mine, the main difference is that although the women's experience of verbal, emotional and psychological abuse is overlapping, verbal abuse is but one way that the emotionally abusive behavioural style manifested for the women. For the women in this study, the iceberg of psychological and emotional abuse had verbal abuse as a tip along with physical, sexual, social, economic and defamatory abuse.

The different aspects of the relationships that the women described as being important to them were their physical and sexual relationships, their economic and social arrangements, their communication patterns and their public portrayal. I describe the women's experience of their partner's core attitudinal and behavioural style as resulting in physical, sexual, economic, social, communication and defamation abuse respectively. Therefore each form of abuse I found in the women's narratives is described in terms of double standards, double binds and boundary violations. This allows the full range of violations to the women's boundaries to be addressed rather than the more socially recognised and overt behaviours that are

typically depicted as abusive. Although the women had diverse experiences of abuse, the way these were underpinned by the commonality of the dynamics is clear. When considering the women's post-separation difficulties such as shared parenting arrangements, this facilitates a more detailed understanding of their experiences.

Defamation abuse

A particularly strong theme in the data was the way in which the women were publically portrayed. I term this defamation abuse. It is not included as a form of abuse in definitions of domestic violence yet it represented a major obstacle to the women in their relationships and interfered with the restoration of their lives post-separation. Defamation abuse is closely related to the 'blame and defame' cycle experienced by the women within the communication patterns of their relationships, except that here it refers to the misrepresentation of the women to others.

In the literature review Bancroft (2002), Pence and Paymar (1993) and whistleblower researchers such as Rothschild and Miethe (1999) were cited as drawing important parallels between the abuse of women and the behaviours and justifications by any oppressive organisation or system. Harassment, intimidation, and isolation were common tactics cited. These were indeed experienced by all the women in this study. As well, the smear campaigns, creating damaging records and creation of damaging records and casting of negative distortions to preserve the image of the organisation that are described in this body of literature were also experienced by the women in this study as being used by their partners. This was a most significantly distressing experience and featured strongly as possibly the greatest obstacle to the restoration of their lives. Defamation affected their reputation and relationships with their children, friends and family, and often extended to the community in which they lived.

The inability of others to detect the use of defamation abuse resulted in collusion with the women's partners by friends, family, children, and professionals, including the judiciary. The women described their partners as using a mixture of a self-pitying/victimised behaviours, charm, blame and persecution to encourage others to see how they themselves were actually being victimised by the women.

Bancroft and Silverman (2002) also refer to the men in their practice as adroitly creating sympathy for themselves in the negative portrayal of their partners. Stark (2007) notes how ‘controlling partners perceive events through a veil of primary narcissism that suggests that they are the real victims, not their partners, and may persist in claiming to be battered themselves even after being confronted with evidence of the harms they’ve caused’ (Stark, 2007, pp. 246-247). The women in this study were united in their descriptions of their partners as claiming they were the victims.

The double standard of a denial of accountability underpins this behaviour and creates a double bind where the women are first imposed on in a multitude of ways, then scapegoated for their reactions. A pattern of boundary violations was regularly experienced by all the women in terms of their rights and needs for accurate representation to others.

A Commonality of Impact

The findings of this research noted a commonality of effects or impact on the women to the dynamics of their relationships. Similar to the web of abuse, these effects were highly interrelated and irrespective of whether they had experienced physical violence. Although half of the women in this study did not experience physical violence, I found that the narratives of these women conveyed a response to the dynamics of their relationships which was identical to that of the women who did experience physical violence.

The difficulty in naming and defining the non-physical component of domestic violence is reflected in the literature on the effects of domestic violence. I looked at research on the effects of abuse for women in both violent and non-violent relationships.

The effects of abuse in the absence of physical violence was researched by Chang (1996), Hirigoyen, (1998) and Ferraro and Johnson (1983). Chang focuses on

psychological abuse, Hirigoyen emotional abuse and Ferraro and Johnson on the process of victimization, which they refer to as an ‘emotional career of victimisation’. They refer to a loss of confidence, self-doubt, and a sense of inferiority. Emotional distress such as confusion, despair, guilt, shame and loss of trust is also common to these studies, as is the physical symptoms of stress such as depression. This study had similar findings.

The effects of psychological and emotional abuse in physically violent relationships are discussed by Sleutal (1998). Sleutal cites studies over the previous 15 years and notes similar results to the research on women who did not experience physical violence. Loss of self, identity, dignity and trust were common to the majority of the participants. Emotional consequences of guilt, shame, failure, feelings of inferiority and loss of confidence are cited. Sleutal remarked upon the identical terminology of ‘brainwashing’, ‘going crazy’ and ‘being a prisoner’ that was used by women over a range of qualitative studies.

The process of entrapment and recovery from abuse where there was physical violence was researched by Landenburger (1989), Mills (1985), Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995), Wuest and Merrit-Gray (1999 and 2001), and Smith et al. (1995). Common to all is the women’s descriptions of a shrinking, loss of, or eroded sense of self. This body of research defines the stages of entrapment and recovery. The findings on these stages subsume the effects noted in non-physically abusive relationships and physically abusive relationships. In particular, Smith et al. (1995) elaborate on the stages further and draw links to the need for medical, public health and criminal justice interventions to disrupt the disempowerment process and challenge their ‘negative altered identity’ (Smith et al., 1995, p. 181).

The findings of this research closely resemble the studies on the process of entrapment and losing power where there is no experience of physical assault, as well as the effects of emotional and psychological abuse in physically abusive relationships. The ‘emotional career of victimisation’ described by Ferraro and Johnson (1983) includes cognitive interpretations, feelings and physiological

responses. Emotional distress (confusion, despair, guilt and shame) loss of confidence, inferiority and depression are common to this career. The sense of fear is experienced physiologically and emotionally.

The findings of my research compare strongly to this research, both for the women who experienced physical violence and those who didn't. I am more closely aligned with Smith et al. (1995), as they position the perception of threat as an effect on the women. My findings point to several layers of threat that hampered the women: the threat represented by their partners, the threat represented by their partner's friends and family and by their own families, and the threats represented by inadequate socio-legal intervention. The experience of subtle threats as well as more direct threats exacerbates the need to try and survive the situation rather than exit it.

Within all the literature, Landenburger (1989), and Smith et al. (1995) refer to an 'enduring' or 'managing' phase, which is similar to my theme of 'focusing on survival'. Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995, p. 405) refer to the 'minimising abuse' stage and describe the women's experience at this stage as 'a chess game of watching and planning ways to minimise the extent and frequency of abuse'. This phase was also important to the women in this study because of the cognitive debilitation induced by the intensity and frequency of boundary violations and the inability to do anything other survive and function.

Common to all the studies in the literature review, irrespective of the experience of physical violence, is the loss or erosion of a sense of self as described by the women in my study. This is also described in the research as altered identity (Smith et al. (1995) and relinquishing of parts of self (Merritt-Gray and Wuest, 1995). Chang (1996) elaborates on the women's experience of being criticised, lacking support, adapting to and trying to please their partners, longing for emotional attachment, love and intimacy as leading to the loss of sense of self.

This is similar to the experiences of the women in my study. A loss of self or altered identity was the consequence of chronically over-adapting and overcompensating for

their partners at the expense of their own needs. A loss of self and the accompanying confusion, self-doubt and self-blame made it difficult to take any action until it got to the point where they experienced a pervasive sense of their own demise. There was invariably a defining moment after which they could no longer ignore the need to save themselves. This is a significant theme particularly for the women I interviewed because of their concerns about how to save themselves psychologically in order to continue parenting.

The sense of dying referred to by the women in this study appeared directly related to the women's altered sense and loss of identity. It is reminiscent of the mental anguish and breaking point described by Landenburger (1989). The need to save themselves in order to parent was an important motivator behind the majority of the women's decision to leave the relationship. It is a clear indicator of the disempowerment inherent in the dynamics of their relationships and extends the earlier research on the effects of domestic violence.

Smith's et al.'s (1995) research on the key effects of living with abuse presents a circle divided into six domains representing each effect. The effects are described as integrated rather than empirically distinct and co-exist in the lives of women. The findings of this research concur with Smith et al's (1995) conceptualisation in that the effects of the abuse were interlinked and could not be isolated.

I suggest the 'effects' described by the women in this study are a pattern of responses to the web of abuse. They are not linear or discrete phases but a web of responses to a web of abuse. Viewing the women as responding to the dynamics of their relationships as opposed to analysing the effects seems to do their experience greater justice. The commonality of responses by the women to the dynamics in turn influenced the dynamics, as confusion, loss of confidence and a sense of self, for example, made it difficult to ascertain how and when they were being abused. I suggest their responses were in fact a reaction to the overall loss of power. The commonalities of response in the women's stories indicate that the loss of power is irrespective of physical violence and is underpinned by common dynamics that are

very difficult to change, particularly when the women were hampered by confusion, self-doubt and self-blame.

An important and overlooked point in earlier research is that the women's responses to the loss of power in the relationship were used against them by their partners as evidence that their inferiority was causing difficulties within the relationship. The women were defamed for the emotional reactivity, depression or anxiety that can be argued were the result of the oppression they experienced in their relationships.

In addition, the women experienced being affected by other forms of loss inherent in experiencing such a pattern of boundary violations. These were evident throughout each aspect of the women's relationships and are outlined in the table below. The dotted lines draw attention to the permeability of the boundaries between each aspects of the relationship. They also illustrate that the behaviours and losses were not particular to each aspect but were influenced by and merged with all the others.

Table 4: Summary of the Losses and Consequences of the Web of Abuse

Communication Abuse	Social Abuse	Defamation Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Economic Abuse
Disregarding rather than responding behaviours	Obstructing rather than facilitating behaviours	Impugning rather than accountable behaviours	Subordinating rather than reciprocal behaviours	Threatening rather than supportive behaviours	Depriving rather than sustaining behaviours
Loss of voice and agency	Loss of social resources and social capital	Loss of social validation and support	Loss of intimacy and reciprocity	Loss of safety and autonomy	Loss of security and financial resources
Silenced	Isolated	Alienated	Subjugated	Threatened	Exploited

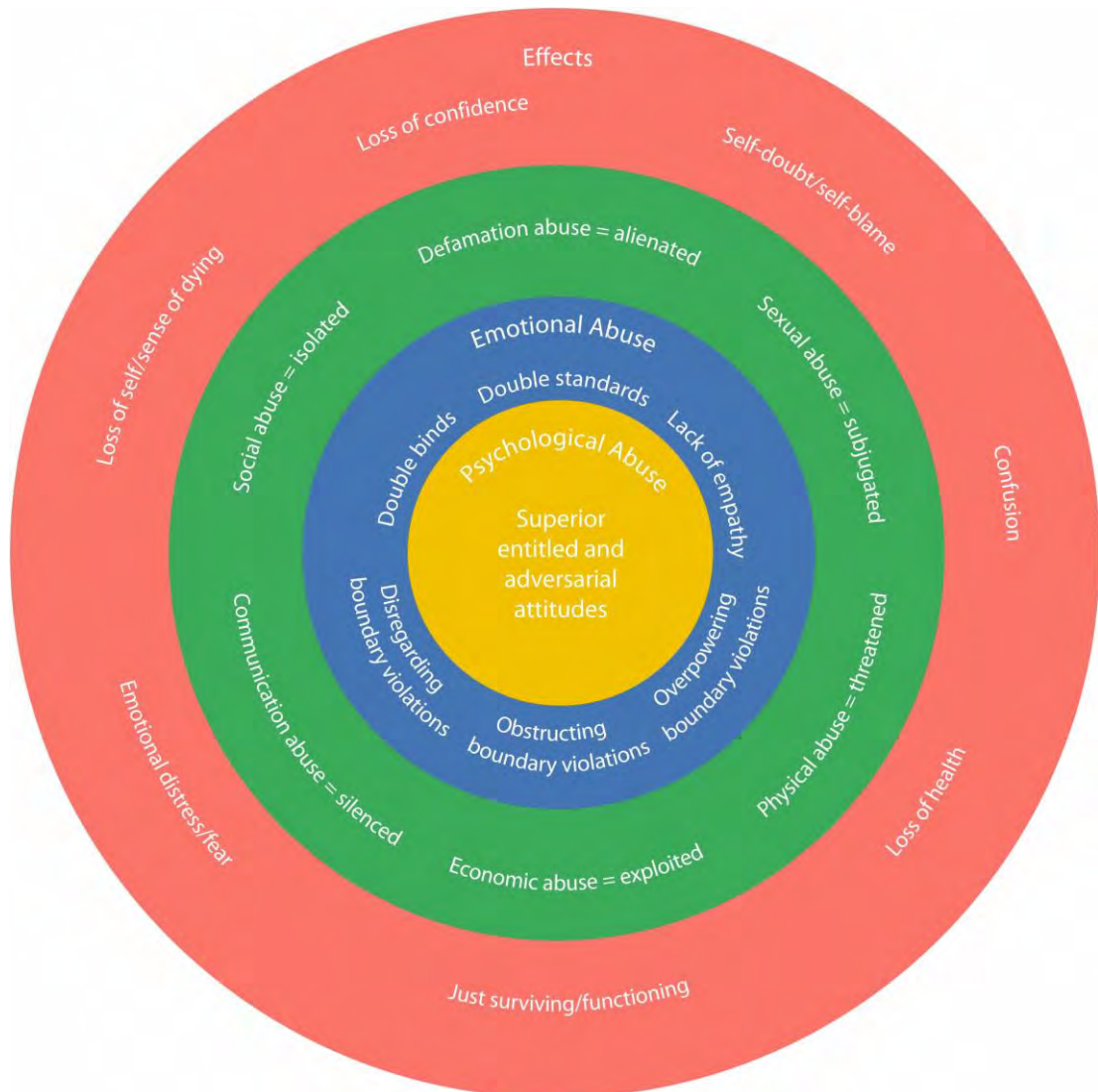
In Chapter Six I explained how the women endeavoured to restore these losses post-separation. In drawing attention to the conceptualisation of domestic violence as being independent of physical violence, there is a challenge to the way the responses to, or effects of, domestic violence are researched and socio-legally addressed. In

order to provide an adequate socio-legal response to domestic violence for women whose children continue a relationship with their father, it seems vital to consider these responses and losses independently of the evidence of physical violence. These types of effects were of great importance to the women, as they reflected the depth and breadth of the position the dynamics put them in physically, sexually, economically, socially, verbally and in the way they were publically portrayed.

The holistic set of losses and consequences from each type of abuse possible within domestic violence do not feature in the research literature. There tends to be a fragmentation of the effects of domestic violence to the effects of one or other form of abuse. A more holistic approach to the overall consequences of living within a relentless pattern of double standards, double binds and boundary violations draws attention to the disempowerment from which the women had to restore their lives post-separation.

Figure 5, on the following page, visually represents the ‘effects’ of domestic violence on the women in this study. The centrality of psychological and emotional abuse to all the other forms of abuse resulted in the experience of confusion, loss of confidence, self-doubt, self-blame, loss of self, a sense of dying, emotional distress, fear and a focus on survival. These responses to the dynamics of the relationship were highly interrelated rather than sequential or linear. The losses inherent in each form of abuse (alienated, subjugated, threatened, exploited, silenced and isolated) are included to add depth to the way the women were impacted by the web of abuse. This figure illustrates the major obstacles the women had to negotiate in order to restore their lives post-separation. The obstacles are the direct result of being in a relationship where the dynamics were weighed too heavily against them to achieve any equality, autonomy and agency. This figure also creates the context for understanding how the women’s experiences of post-separation shared parenting would continue to oppress the women unless the dynamics of the relationship were detected and disrupted.

Figure 5: The Consequences of the Web of Abuse



Conflict and anger

Writers in the area of domestic violence suggest that where there is a power imbalance and fear, the possibility of a mutual causality of violence is precluded (Jaffe et al., 2003). Although women have the capacity to be violent and abusive, the dynamics identified in this research suggest that physical violence is not necessarily

an interactional problem but the consequence of the attitudes and behaviours that lead to an inevitable pattern of boundary violations.

To label issues within relationships as ‘interactional difficulties’ risks overlooking the fact that the women may have been attempting to resist their ex-partner’s domination. When the women in this study attempted to elevate their own needs or concerns to the same level as their partner’s, they were viewed and defamed by their partners as

being unnecessarily conflictual or provocative. This placed the women in a double bind. They were often blamed for ‘putting up’ with their partner’s behaviour or were blamed for the way they responded.

This is not meant to imply the women did not have the capacity to be abusive or difficult, with their own personal or relationship difficulties. The women in this study were quite clear that they did not see themselves as without fault. However, within the context of the power differential evident within all these relationships, these difficulties were less relevant than in relationships that are more equal. The personality of the partners was also less relevant, as I suggest these dynamics are independent of personality type or disorder. The main dynamic that created difficulties was an adversarial or retaliatory response towards the women when they resisted their partner’s sense of superiority and entitlement. This would sometimes, but not always, include the use of physical violence.

The findings of this research also questions the role of ‘anger’ as the cause for physically violent episodes. If anger is an adversarial response to having a sense of entitlement challenged, such anger is a fundamentally oppressive tactic to maintain one’s sense of entitlement and power over, rather than a reaction to being treated poorly by the women.

Walker’s (1984) presents a theory of cyclical explosions of pent-up anger, frustration, or painful feelings. If the men in Walker’s study were objecting to challenges to an inflated sense of entitlement, this is a significantly different experience to the anger,

frustration and painful feelings in a relationship that are not the outcome of a chronic power differential.

Walker's study was also based only on women who had experienced physical violence. Although cyclical explosions may be one type of cycle within domestic violence that many women can recognise, the experience of physical or sexual violence for the women in this study was often a distinctly premeditated or spontaneous event. Physical violence could also occur when the women were busy, distracted, contented, sick or asleep, without any lead-up. I would suggest there are many other cycles or patterns that may also occur that do not hinge on physical violence. One cycle alone does not capture the complexity or chronicity of the dynamics of domestic violence. Women have struggled to articulate the patterned ways in which they have been oppressed and denied equality, autonomy and agency.

This research also questions the gender neutral, gender symmetry research on domestic violence that focuses on physical violence. Studies that present an argument for gender symmetry in domestic violence disregard the dynamics identified in this research and in particular do not take into account those relationships that do not include physical violence. If we regard conflict within relationships where domestic violence occurs as primarily the outcome of resistance to oppression, it contradicts the arguments posed by men's rights groups for the mutual causality of violence between partners (Flood, 2003).

Both Laing (2008) and Kimmel (2002) propose that domestic violence is a regime of coercive control. Gender symmetry in physical violence is therefore not viable when women's violence to their partners is taken in context of the other forms of abuse experienced from their partners. Following this line of reasoning, women's anger and/or use of violence captured in gender symmetry research must be differentiated from a response to a loss of equality, autonomy and agency within the relationship. It must also be differentiated from self-defence, protecting children, retaliation, and being set up purposively to be violent. Both conflict and anger take on a different

meaning when considered in the context of being trapped in a pre- or post-separation web of abuse and a pattern of boundary violations.

In sum, whereas the idea of anger may explain some use of violence against another person, it was not pertinent to the women in this study. Even if anger can be posited as leading to some of the physical violence experienced by the women from their partners, it does not explain the commonality of dynamics between the two groups of women. Anger does not explain why the women were subject to a concerted and relentless pattern of double standards, double binds and a pattern of boundary violations in every aspect of their relationship, with the result that they may not be allowed their own bank accounts, social freedom, sexual equality or physical safety, for example. Nor does it explain the physical violence that could occur when the women were distracted, asleep, contented or busy.

A Post-Separation Web of Abuse

Although there is an extensive body of literature on separation after domestic violence and the risk of physical assault, the literature on the long-term experiences of women with shared parenting, even where their experiences of physical violence have been legally validated, is very limited. The research that does focus on shared parenting in a context of domestic violence pertains primarily to those women who experienced physical violence from their ex-partners. Women who experienced other forms of abuse but a minor if any pattern of physical violence are not well addressed in the post-separation shared parenting literature.

The qualitative research that gave rise to the Duluth model in 1984 (Pence & Paymar, 1993), Walker's (1984) cycle of abuse, Kirkwood's (1993) conceptualisation of emotional abuse, and Bancroft and Silverman's (2002) conceptualisation of the dynamics of domestic violence based on practice experience with offenders all draw the link between the dynamics of domestic violence and difficulties post-separation. However, only Kirkwood (1993) included women in her study who had not experienced physical violence from their partners and made the links between those

women she noted as severely terrorised despite the lack of physical violence and the difficulties they would suffer post-separation. My study strongly concurs with the findings of Kirkwood's study.

The experiences of women navigating family law and legislation practices and the difficulties in separating in the aftermath of domestic violence, as elaborated by Humphries and Thiara (2002) and Kaye et al., (2003b), were also replicated in the findings of this study. The incapacity of the judiciary to fully protect women post-separation from physical violence was obvious for the women in this research. In addition to this were the problems posed for women who had relationships underpinned by the same dynamics but with either no experience of physical violence, or that which did not meet legal criteria or evidentiary requirements.

For the women in this study, post-separation restraining orders or apprehended violence orders had little, if any, effect on the range of difficulties the women experienced in shared parenting arrangements. As I interviewed women who had been separated for at least two years, with many of the women having been separated for between five and 30 years, I was able to gain an understanding of the way issues would reappear or escalate over time. I was able to observe the circumstances in which disempowerment continued because of the nature and extent to which the web of abuse could continue post-separation.

Many of the difficulties described by the women were unrelated to whether their ex-partner was allowed in their vicinity. For example, the web of abuse could extend into the women's lives in other ways similar to those proposed by Sev'er (1997) in her model of separation abuse. She describes the tactics used to control women post-separation, including the use of intimidation, children and other loved ones, economic and legal abuse, coercion, threats and explosive violence. These tactics are well supported by the findings of this study. The hub of Sev'er's circle was power and control and the rim was physical and sexual violence. Whereas the women in this study did not necessarily experience explosive violence, there was the potential for it because of the attitudinal and behavioural style of their ex-partners.

In this research, the experiences of post-separation parenting arrangements were underpinned by the same set of dynamics irrespective of whether they had experienced physical violence or not. The women revealed how their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style that oppressed them pre-separation re-emerged within their post-separation parenting arrangements but also created obstacles to the restoration of the other aspects of their lives as well. In particular, the double standards and double binds inherent to this style had the potential to negate all the women's attempts for equality, autonomy and agency.

The post-separation shared parenting literature reflects the experiences of women who were in a particular shared parenting arrangement. For example, Kaye et al. (2003b) address women in private or court-ordered unsupervised shared parenting arrangements. Harrison (2008) and Parker et al. (2008) address the experiences of women who were in court-ordered and supervised shared parenting arrangements and Shalansky et al. (1999) address women who were in unsupervised arrangements and in the process of negotiating custody and access. The common link between these studies was the capacity and extent of the women's ex-partners to continue to exert control post-separation and the women's lack of legal rights and support.

This study fully supports these findings but takes a different stance towards shared parenting. For the women in this study, 'shared parenting' was a misnomer. 'Shared parenting' resembled the dynamics of the pre-separation relationship, which were that the women had to be more cognisant of their ex-partner's needs than vice versa and were retaliated against if they did not adopt an accommodating role. First, this study notes how the dynamics of the relationships were reflected in the waxing and waning of paternal time with the children post-separation. This was regardless of the needs of the children or whether this placed the woman at a disadvantage. An important feature of the women's post-separation shared parenting experiences, for example, was those periods of time where the father withdrew completely from parenting, or conversely where they denied or restricted the women's access to the children. Second, this study observes that despite the waxing and waning of paternal time, there was a constant avoidance of accountability and responsibility towards the

children's needs. Third, the findings explain the attitudinal and behavioural style underlying the way in which the amount of fathering time and level of responsibility was never negotiated with the women but merely inflicted upon them. Fourth, whereas the findings of this study strongly support all the research on shared parenting, it extends them to women who had not experienced physical violence from the father of their children.

In general, this study finds that the women's shared parenting arrangements reflected the dynamics of the pre-separation relationship in the way that these arrangements were in the best interests of the father, to which the women and children had to adapt. Finally, the initial focus on shared parenting arrangements in this study is superseded by the acknowledgment of the role these arrangements play within the entire post-separation pattern of boundary violations inherent to the web of abuse. For example, each pre-separation form of abuse referred to in the web of abuse extended into the women's lives in a post-separation form to some degree, regardless of the type of shared parenting arrangement.

The women in this study described having to counter the re-emergence of their ex-partner's core attitudinal and behavioural style post-separation and the consequent pattern of post-separation pattern of boundary violations. These violations include the same behaviours and tactics of ex-partners noted by previous post-separation shared parenting research (for example, the use of intimidation, verbal abuse, harassment, manipulation, threats, stalking, physical violence, neglectful or harmful parenting practices as noted in the research of Harrison, 2008; Kaye et al., 2003b; Parker et al., 2008 and Shalansky, 1999). However, this research suggests these behaviours and tactics are like the tip of an iceberg and positions them within a post-separation variation of the web of abuse. It notes how the women in this study were similarly affected by the continuation of physical and sexual abuse post-separation, but also in ways that are less obvious than reflected in the research on shared parenting. For example, hostile and misogynist attitudes were experienced in ways that were difficult for the women to articulate. It also locates the women's experiences of shared parenting within a post-separation pattern of economic exploitation, social

interference, defamation to significant others, and destructive communication patterns which extended beyond threats, verbal abuse and putdowns, for example, to the blocking of any attempts for negotiation and the withholding of vital information. In sum, the post-separation forms of abuse were highly interrelated and merged to create unlimited possibilities for a relentless pattern of boundary violations in every aspect of the women's lives.

It seemed that the risk of a defeated future was increased for those women who were in intense shared parenting arrangements with young children, and had years of shared parenting ahead. This was where the web of abuse had the potential to be particularly concentrated, because regular interaction with an ex-partner and the need to consult on decisions for the children created many more sites where the ex-partner could maintain control. It was, as noted by Kaye et al. (2003b), exacerbated where the women were concerned for their children's health and well-being when with their father because of neglectful or dangerous parenting practices. Further, intense shared parenting clearly created anomalous parenting issues for the women that put them in double binds.

However, there were women in this study where their ex-partner was weaving an intense web of abuse in their lives during periods where they were spending irregular, if any, time with the children (for example, in the case of Genevieve, Virginia, Sebrina and Sharni). These women still felt directly under their ex-partner's control and experienced a constant invasion of their boundaries whilst carrying the total economic, emotional and physical responsibility for the children's needs. They described not only being stalked, harassed, intimidated and threatened but also social isolation and alienation because of exhaustion, defamation and economic hardship. Restraining orders could not fully contain their ex-partners and the constant current of hostility and blame affected their ability to restore their lives. The women knew that despite their ex-partner's erratic and irresponsible approach to parenting, if they should seek 50 per cent shared parenting time, it was highly unlikely they would ever be held accountable for either their behaviour, or the periods in which they had withdrawn from the children, or had denied or restricted the women's access to the

children. These women felt unable to bring this to anyone's attention and thus felt powerless to protect their children or themselves.

For those 17 women in the two current contact groups, the continuation of these attitudes created major obstacles to the restoration of their lives. It was difficult to avoid the replication of the pre-separation relationship dynamic, which was constantly making decisions in reaction to and revolving around their ex-partners if they wanted to avoid repercussions. This was the case regardless of the level of physical violence they might have experienced from their partner. For the 13 women whose children were no longer in contact, the restoration of their lives post-separation had clearly become easier once contact stopped.

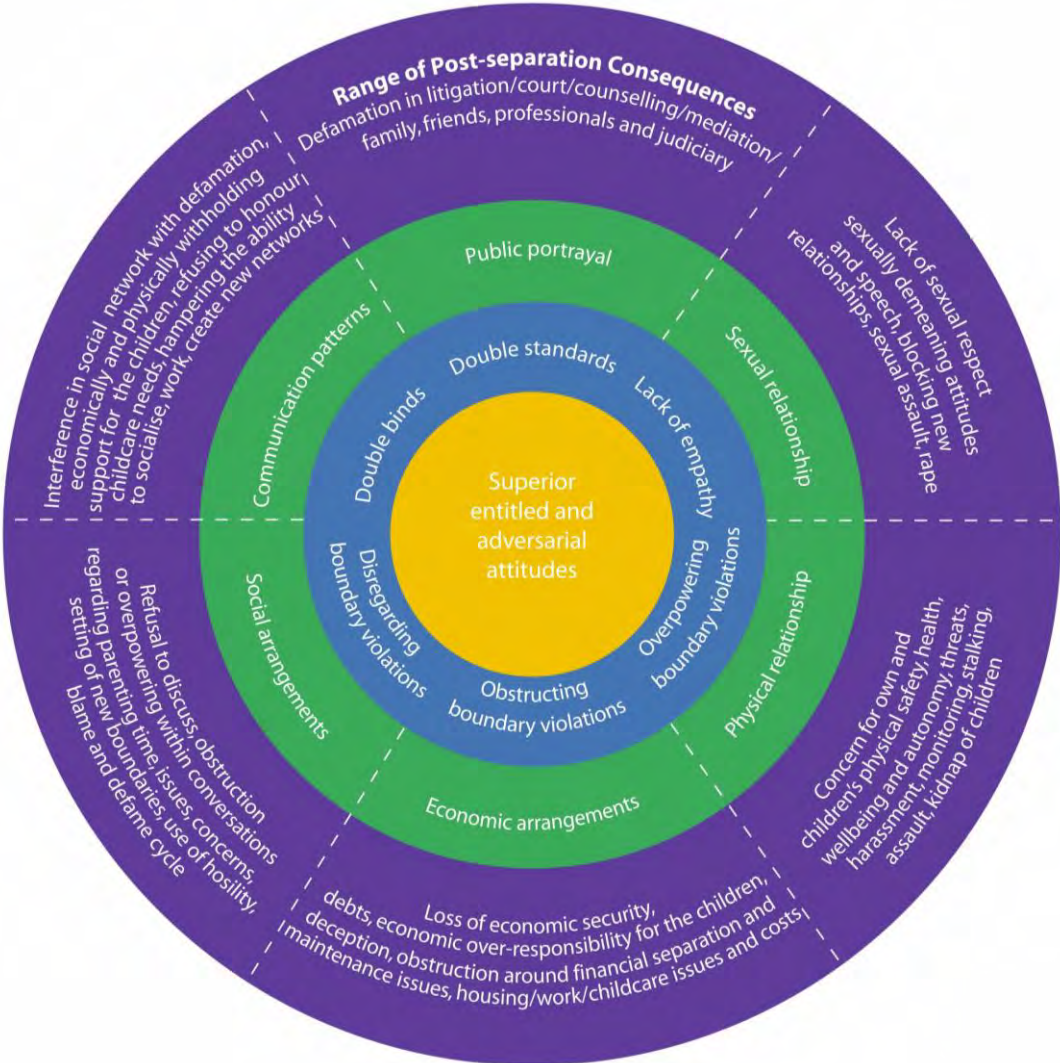
A universal theme for the women was that despite any mediation, counselling or judicial intervention, they had not been able to have any voice in how the restoration of their lives post-separation was affected by shared parenting arrangements. The rights of the father were given greater emphasis. The process of achieving independence was exacerbated by the fact that the socio-legal system could not acknowledge the complexity of the dynamics or differentiate them from the fathers merely exerting their rights to contact with their children.

The women in this sample had been separated for at least two years and up to 33 years. This allowed the waxing and waning of issues the women experienced over the lifespan of their post-separation shared parenting arrangements to come into focus. The situations that arose for the mothers and children post-separation because of the father's attitudinal and behavioural style created what can be described as a patterned and predictable cycle of neglect, control and chaos. I suggest a focus on discrete stages of separation in the aftermath of domestic violence, for example from two to five years, is less useful than understanding how these possible cycles can play out over the shared parenting career and the potential for times of impending doom, crisis or quiet to arise at any stage of this career. Changes of location, employment, ages and stages of the children, and the relationship status of the women and their ex-partners could disrupt the fragile balance of any arrangement. For example, some of

the women had faced court and custody battles prior to two years of separation but others only after being separated for seven years. Yet, the dynamics and themes underpinning these experiences were similar.

Figure 6, on the following page, blends the information from each data chapter and the two previous diagrams in this discussion to show the links between the pre-separation and post-separation experiences of the women in this study. The need to share the parenting of the children with their ex-partner is shown as being part of a post-separation version of the web of abuse outlined in Chapter Four. In this figure, the links are made between the women's pre-separation relationship and the range of post-separation difficulties that included but were not limited to the shared parenting arrangements. The next section expands more fully on the obstacles to achieving post-separation independence when linked to their ex-partner by children.

Figure 6: A Post-separation Web of Abuse II



A process of colonisation

As I drew further links between the three maps that evolved out of the data analysis and then blended them into the one overall map in Figure 6, it became clear to me that one way of understanding the women's experiences was that they had been colonised by the attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners. Drawing parallels with a process of colonisation helped me to avoid fragmenting the women's experiences and gave credibility to the commonality of dynamics underlying the individual differences in their relationships. It allowed me to avoid presenting the women as a homogenous category that 'attempts to generalise or reduce' (Power, 1998, p. 118) women as victims and the need to define men as a homogenous group of abusers. Rather, it takes the emphasis away from gender identity and places it on a gender experience of the mechanisms of domination. The analogy of colonisation allows me to 'speak out' about the women's experiences in this study, rather than 'speak for them' (Klein, cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 16) and does not reduce their experiences to a single unified standpoint at the expense of their diversity of experience. It also provides a context from which to understand the women's post-separation experiences and the difficulties they had in achieving independence when linked to their ex-partners by children.

Fundamental to the women's narratives was a sense of being related to in a manner which denied mutuality and demanded compliance. This happened in both subtle, unobtrusive ways and in a blatant fashion. All the women intentionally or unwittingly described how they were subject to the expectations and assumptions of their partners. This process of subjugation resembles the process of one country colonising another. For the women, it had occurred against their will and at their expense but unfortunately without their awareness. The women's narratives indicated the process of colonisation was a more gradual process than achieved by a sudden 'military' conquest. The process escalated as they reached important relationship milestones that demanded greater collaboration from their partners. At this point, each narrative resembled the words of a colonised people whose hopes, dreams, customs and culture were gradually eroded and replaced by the attitudes and behaviours of the colonising

country. Resistance to this process was met with punitive measures to suppress it. The argument that interpersonal relationships can be compared to international relationships was pointed out by Pence and Paymar (1993):

Differences among people are not celebrated and treasured but used as a reason to dominate. When relationships of dominance become the norm in a culture, then all individuals within it are socialised to internalize those values or exist on the fringe of society. Individuals mirror global and national relationships in their own interpersonal relationships (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 2)

Links can be drawn between the superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes core to the web of abuse and colonising attitudes. Similarly, links can be drawn between the consequent double standards, double binds, lack of empathy and boundary violations to a colonising behavioural style. Figure 7, on the following page, illustrates how a colonising attitudinal and behavioural style affected each aspect of the women's relationship. The extension of this process of colonisation into their post-separation relationships was exacerbated by the women's continued connection to their ex-partners by a range of post-separation parenting arrangements.

Pre-separation colonisation

The experiences of the women in this study suggest they were physically, sexually, socially, economically, verbally and publically colonised by their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style. This explains the different layers of women's experience of domestic violence than is able to be conveyed through the term 'abuse'. The idea of being sexually colonised, for example, suggests a particular lens through which to view the women's entire sexual relationship with their partner than is possible if the focus is on sexual violence, assault or rape. It also raises the question as to where sexual colonisation of women becomes sexual abuse.

The women were denied self-sovereignty within every aspect of their lives and had to give way to the standards, needs and culture of their partner. This cost them their sense of identity, their confidence and their health. The process of colonisation of the women by their partners was particularly entrapping as the women were confused. They did not recognise and were unable to counter the dynamics of colonisation, as

Figure 7: Domestic Violence as Pre- and Post-separation Colonisation



they were operating under different, more democratic hopes and assumptions about their relationships. Yet, where there is a process of colonisation of a country or a person, resources will not be democratically shared, issues will not be democratically negotiated and there will be a lack of respect for the other country's or person's culture, customs and needs. Using the analogy of international relationships, it can be argued that the women's needs and boundaries within their relationships were disregarded, obstructed or overpowered in ways similar to the needs and boundaries of any colonised country.

For the women in this study, although equal status, autonomy and agency were not possible under these conditions, the power differential and pattern of boundary violations were not always observable to an outsider. This was particularly the case when there were no obvious incidents of physical violence or allegations of sexual violence. It became clear, as this model was developed, that the women experienced different styles of colonisation, depending on the pattern of boundary violations. One style appeared more underhand and insidious, with fewer incidents of the more obvious, overpowering boundary violations, particularly pre-separation. The other colonising style was more aggressive and included more obvious overpowering boundary violations such as overt threats, intimidation or stalking. The underhanded style could include physical violence or not, as could the more aggressive style. Post-separation, however, these styles could change.

To complicate matters, although colonisation implies an impact in every area of life, the women in this study could experience a more concentrated colonising influence in some areas of their lives than other. For example, Virginia and Genevieve were not as socially constrained as other women pre-separation, yet experienced sexual assault. Other women, for example Gabrielle, Jodie and Penny, experienced sexual abuse via disregard and disrespect rather than with sexual assault, yet were far more economically deprived and socially isolated than Virginia and Genevieve.

Underlying this diversity of experience was their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style. The partner's apparent intent, whether unconscious or otherwise; to manage the

women's lives to their benefit created a predictable set of symptoms in every area of their relationship. This did not necessarily include physical or sexual violence but the consequent double standards, double binds and boundary violations conferred an overall inferior citizenship upon the women and the exploitation of their resources.

Within each of the main styles of colonisation, I detected a continuum in the women's descriptions of their partners. At the one end of the continuum were the partners who were less vigorously and relentlessly colonising. These partners were less constantly overpowering of the women's boundaries. They were more inclined to be neglectful or passively aggressive than forceful and invasive and tended to fade out of the women's lives post-separation to some extent. I note that Wendy, Jodie, Karly, Collette, Alice and Veronica describe their ex-partner in this light, despite the fact that Veronica and Alice appeared to be more aggressively colonised.

At the other end of the continuum were the partners who appeared more relentless, ruthless and driven in their pursuit of pre- and post-separation domination and colonisation of their partner and children. This did not always result in high demands for paternal time but extended the web of abuse further into the other aspects of the women's post-separation lives. For example, the narratives of Jane, Leanne, Carol, Elle, Sebrina and Sharni convey how even within those periods where there was little if any fathering time, the colonising attitudes and behaviours of their ex-partner extended into their social lives, their communication patterns over any issue, the way they were publically portrayed, their economic arrangements, and the way they were treated physically and sexually.

The women in this study who were colonised in a more underhand manner had not had their experiences identified by current screening tools and were not eligible for a socio-legal response. Even behaviours such as stalking, intimidation and threats can be executed in ways that police are unable to detect and prevent. The dynamics of domestic violence outlined in this study are not necessarily observable to the untrained eye, as they can occur without significant symptoms such as incidents of physical or sexual violence, stalking, threats or intimidation. Unfortunately, they are

not easy to describe and explain, and it may be very difficult to provide direct evidence of controlling behaviours such as subtle threats and intimidation.

Another common link between the colonising styles was how the women were responded to when they tried to assert their individuality, rights or needs. They describe a competitive and adversarial response. Like a colonising country, the women's partners showed no tolerance to being held accountable, being questioned or being stood up to. They consistently deflected responsibility and refused to pay attention to their partner's viewpoint and needs where these might clash with their own. The use of self-pity, victimisation, blame, accusations, intimidation, threats, force and assault to get the women back under 'colonial rule' and into an accommodating role again was clear.

Of significance to the women within the colonisation process were the possible repercussions for either trying to gain independence or collaboration pre- or post-separation. There was the constant risk of revenge and punishment, no matter how subtle, and the women were always afraid of going 'too far' as they tried to assert themselves and set healthy boundaries. In fact, the women's partners resembled a colonising country that views the different forms of resistance by colonised peoples with a lack of empathy and contempt. There was blindness to the impact of their behaviour and a relentless deflection of responsibility with the use of the 'blame and defame' cycle. The presence of their partner's intention, conscious or otherwise to dominate the relationships precluded the ability of these women to evolve the relationship or even be treated respectfully.

Anecdotal stories of a colonised people are that they can respond in several ways to being colonised, such as with uprisings, revolt, an underground movement or a secret life, submission, collusion, mental illness or suicide. These same responses were clear in the women I interviewed. As stated by Stark (2007, p.17), 'The greatest challenge in representing these experiences is how to accurately portray the strategy used to subordinate these women without losing sight of their indomitable spirit'. In this research, the women were subordinated by these attitudes whether the relationship

had included incidents of physical violence or not. It was also irrespective of any feelings of a bond, love, or the acknowledgement of times of fun and good will. Despite their experiences and the relentless array of pre and post-separation obstacles created by the colonising process, the ‘indomitable spirit’ of the women in this study shone in their persistent pursuit of a better life for their children and themselves. It was also clear that the women actively and consistently resisted colonisation and attempted to set healthy boundaries where it was possible.

Post-separation colonisation

The women also faced great difficulty in extricating themselves from post-separation colonisation. If we are to understand that in their relationships with their partners, the women in this study were sexually, physically, economically, socially, verbally and publically colonised, their post-separation issues and obstacles can be seen in a different light than simply the conflict, anger and despair inherent in family breakdown.

Depending on the colonising style of their ex-partner, the difficulty for all the women post-separation lay in re-establishing themselves from the impact, losses and consequences inherent to being colonised. The losses and consequences of the web of abuse, outlined in Table 5, are summed up as the loss of: voice and agency; social resources and capital; social validation and support; intimacy and reciprocity; safety and autonomy; and economic security and resources. Additionally, the women had described the overall impact of the web of abuse as being a loss of clarity, confidence, identity, and mental, emotional and physical health.

At the same time, these women were facing the post-separation colonising tactics by their ex-partners because of the continuing link with the children. The need to establish post-separation shared parenting arrangements and continued economic support for the children provided the women’s ex-partner with extra sites within which they could continue to colonise. Depending on the colonising style of their ex-partner, which could change post-separation, the women felt reduced again to accommodating and compensating for the waxing and waning of paternal time

desired with the children and a constant refusal of responsibility. Post-separation, the women continued to be denied reciprocity and accountability with regard to arrangements for the children and subjected to highly adversarial responses if they resisted such entitled attitudes. The women were predictably affected by their ex-partner's continued efforts to deny them economic help or any independence or collaboration post-separation. Inadvertent socio-legal collusion with the rights of the father to the detriment of the mothers in this study further compounded the women's experience of being unable to extricate themselves from their coloniser's web of abuse.

The dynamics were not confined to the features of the shared parenting arrangements but extended into how the women's boundaries were treated in every aspect of their lives. Unless the web of abuse was disrupted in some way, the women could experience the continuation of each 'type' of abuse but in post-separation form. Within this context, the women had to undertake a post-separation journey towards independence. This was perilous for those women who received inadequate social recognition or support for their situation. Unless they had a strong support network that had not been destroyed by their partner's defamation, the majority of the women in this study found themselves misunderstood and unsupported. They faced the complex obstacles created by pre and post-separation colonisation on their own.

The tactics and justifications of colonising behaviour continued post-separation in the women's lives unless disrupted. This usually occurred when the ex-partner was a less ruthless coloniser and eventually lost interest, as in the case of Wendy, Jodie, Veronica, Collette and Hayley, for example. It was disrupted by professional intervention to some extent for Sam, Jasmine, Emanon and Jessica. It was disrupted to some extent for Barbara when she successfully confronted her partner. Whereas the process was disrupted for these women, it could continue to reverberate in their relationship with themselves, their children and significant others as well as in the economic, social, physical and sexual costs to being colonised. This was the case for all these women.

An overriding concern of this study is the dynamics of the relationship which prevented the women from achieving overall equality, autonomy or agency with their partner. As noted by Merrit-Gray and Wuest (1995, p. 406) regarding the measures the women took to counter the abuse: 'The key point involved in minimising abuse was that no matter how well crafted the survivor's strategies, the abuse never was eliminated'.

Whereas the focus of the data analysis was on these dynamics, this has been at the expense of the analysis and theorising of the women's strength, resilience and stages of restoration or healing in the face of such dynamics. Despite an emphasis on this being integral to feminist and indeed post-colonial approaches to studying the mechanics of oppression, the women in this study wanted the story told of their systemic negation, rather than how they survived or attempted to overcome it pre or post-separation.

Thus, in an effort to conceptualise the web of abuse, the women's stories of how they countered and sometimes successfully interrupted some of the dynamics by strategic, persistent and courageous behaviour remains untold. This is partly, also, a reflection of my disinclination to convey the women in this study in any other light than strong and potent people who were simply ensnared in a web they not only found difficult to articulate, they found it difficult to flourish within or ultimately escape. My underlying assumption is that whether a colonising process is of an interpersonal or international nature, it is no reflection on those who are experiencing the process. Such a process will naturally be resisted in a myriad of ways. The label of 'victim' or 'survivor' draws attention away from the fact that they were simply women, who despite their best efforts to prevent their colonisation, had to find some way to exist within it. Thus, my priority became to detail the web in order to provide vital context for many of the women's thoughts, reactions and behaviours. Further, this illuminates that regardless of their personal strengths, idiosyncrasies or even shortcomings, there was a distinct pattern to the obstacles to their equal citizenship either pre or post-separation.

The women in this study wanted to understand why they had to work so hard to 'survive' the relationship, as part of their healing process. To understand allows a process of healing and the ability to move on in the knowledge that to be caught in a colonising process demanded of them an expenditure of their energy and resources in ways that would have been unnecessary in a more egalitarian relationship.

Therefore, although the data chapters make it clear the women resisted the attitudes and behaviours of their partners, I privileged the data that demonstrated that despite any resistance, retaliation or strategies that achieved intermittent or even permanent success, the stranglehold by their partners on the dynamics would inevitably result in an overall inability of the women to achieve the level of equality, autonomy or agency that they clearly desired and strove for within the relationship itself.

However, the findings of this study bore particularly high similarity to the findings of healing and restoration described by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) and Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999, 2001) on sustaining separation. Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001) describe the process of not going back as having two sub processes; claiming and maintaining territory and relentless justifying. Their study outlined the strengths and healing of the women and described the process of gradually disengaging from their ex-partners and focussing their energy on securing post-separation boundaries in order to prevent re-victimisation.

Many of the women I interviewed had, of course, taken the step of leaving their partners (there were those women in this study who were actually left by their partners and do not fit the dominant image of women trying to extricate themselves from an abusive partner) and were able to claim some territory within their relationships post-separation, despite having to negotiate and facilitate shared parenting arrangements. Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) attend in detail to the labour intensive and strife ridden tasks, risks and obstacles that the women had to address post-separation in claiming and maintaining their territory. This included harnessing the system and setting limits and getting situated in order to reclaim belongings, taking ownership of finances, resuming normal activities and settling children (Wuest

and Merrit-Gray, 1999, 124). This was indeed the case for the women in this study, although the stages in the process were not addressed. The findings of Wuest and Merrit-Gray uses similar language (i.e. territory, boundaries) as this study and provides support for a pre and post-separation colonisation process from which the women had to invest much time and energy and take great risks in order to extract themselves.

In order to convey the intensity of the women's experiences, it is difficult not to be seen to demonise the men who were their partners, or to fail to address the women's strengths and capacity for resistance, or even abuse. Yet this study is not interested in demonising or elevating the behaviours or character of either gender. It focuses on the dynamics of the women's relationships and finally draws a parallel to a colonisation process in order to provide a context for their post- separation lives. The dynamics that entrapped the women in this study could be colluded with, inadvertently or otherwise, by other women in their lives (such as friends, family, practitioners, counsellors, etc). Further, this study does not refute the obvious implication that women would also be capable of maintaining a stranglehold on the dynamics of an intimate relationship with a male or female partner in a similar way.

For the thirty women that I interviewed, however, the person who had the stranglehold on the dynamics of the relationship and was clearly behaving in a colonising manner was their male partner, which had important ramifications for the reclaiming of women's territory, boundaries and rights post- separation within a pro-contact culture.

Finally, with regard to Johnson's Typology (2008) that demonstrates the existence of different types of intimate partner violence, it would seem that the women in this study experienced a continuum of 'Incipient Coercive Controlling Violence' (no physical violence but high coercive control) to 'Coercive Controlling Violence' (higher frequency, severity of physical violence and high coercive control). Their experiences did not match the categories of 'Conflict Motivated Violence' or 'Situational Couple Violence'. Although these two categories are considered forms of

domestic violence, they do not reflect the power differential that the women in this study experienced or the fact that any physical violence they experienced was not the result of conflict. It is possible, however, that these two categories of domestic violence can easily be confused with a more insidious colonisation process that includes physical violence, but it has simply not been detected. This is not to deny the possibility of physical violence in response to conflict where there is no discernible power differential, whether this is framed as coercive control, intimate terrorism or colonisation.

The experiences of the women in this study also suggest that the idea of ‘coercive controlling violence’ could include only one incident of physical violence, or a very minor, underhand pattern of physical violence within the relationship, as well as a higher frequency. The capacity and potential for their partner to use physical violence because of their attitudinal and behavioural style was a common concern for the women in this study post- separation, despite the level to which they had experienced it pre- separation. What may be initially described as Incipient Controlling Violence in their relationship could escalate to Coercive Controlling Violence post- separation, or at any stage of the pre- separation relationship, or in fact vice-versa. In fact, a pattern of Incipient Controlling violence pre- separation may explain the appearance of what Kelly and Johnson (2008) refer to as Separation-Instigated Violence (post- separation physical violence). As noted by Kelly and Johnson (2008, p. 483) ‘it is clear that coercive control must be considered a major risk factor for continued or increased violence’. As well, the women in this study who experienced Incipient Coercive Controlling Violence expressed fear, even terror, at the ways their ex- partner may find to harm them or the children in a manner that did not involve physical violence.

The experiences of the women in this study suggests that the idea of coercive control, or indeed the term ‘intimate terrorism’ as previously used by Johnson (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p. 478) is not a fully accurate descriptor of their experience of domestic violence. The idea of different colonising styles that do not necessarily rely on physical violence but have the potential for it provide a more nuanced description.

These styles also capture the presence and consequences to the women of the more subtle, chronic and pervasive nature of boundary violations than the terms coercive control, or intimate terrorism, are able to convey. The idea of colonisation also provides a context for understanding the diversity and range of post- separation experiences of the women, as it successfully links the episodic events, incidents, neglect or injuries described by the women in their pre- separation relationship into a comprehensible pattern that re- emerges in a post- separation form.

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

In this chapter I have synthesised the findings from three data chapters and have suggested that for the women in this study, domestic violence can be conceptualised independently of physical violence and considered a process of colonisation.

Despite the various legal and research definitions of domestic violence and all of its ‘forms’, it has been the experience of all the women I interviewed that unless they were overtly and frequently physically assaulted, their relationship was not defined or responded to as domestic violence. Even if they had been assaulted, it was often too ‘minor’ or too difficult to prove. Given the advances in our understanding of domestic violence, it is surprising that for their experiences to be named as domestic violence there was a dependency on evidence of specific incidents of physical or sexual violence and little if any attention paid to the overall condition or the dynamics of the relationship. There was therefore less likelihood of receiving appropriate post- separation help and/or support from legal, social and community sources. There were difficult ramifications of this situation for the women in this study, particularly as the dynamics of their relationships had created a commonality of losses and effects that the women needed to restore post-separation whilst still being linked to their ex- partners by parenting issues.

This study confirms the need to see abuse as complex and operating across many sites within women’s lives. I argue that at the heart of domestic violence is a colonising process, which may not always include incidents of physical violence. Such a process

emanates from a chronic core of superior, entitled and adversarial attitudes held towards intimate partners and creates a complete strangle hold on the dynamics of the relationship. Although the women resisted this, they could not affect substantial, if any, change and were unable to flourish.

A concept of colonisation better represents the day-to-day lives of the women in this study than focusing on the definitions and interrelationships between the forms of abuse they experienced. It also provides a useful framework to understand the more subtle nuances of domestic violence and can override an incident/injury conceptualisation of domestic violence by explaining the dynamics underlying and linking all the episodic events, incidents or injuries described by the women. Although the colonisation process experienced by the women in this study did not necessarily include physical violence, it increased the potential for it, particularly post-separation. It also increased the likelihood of oppressive and repercussive behaviour towards the women for attempting to elevate their own rights, needs or concerns to their ex-partner, or for trying to achieve a state of independence.

It was clear from the women's narratives how such a colonising process would not revert to a more egalitarian style of relating once the relationship ended. Because of the link with the children, the women found it difficult post-separation to re-establish independence and extricate themselves from colonial control or neglect. They were unable to fully remove themselves from the colonising attitudinal and behavioural style of their partners, particularly when this was colluded with by the legal system in the pursuit of father's rights to shared parenting. Whether these attitudes and behaviours continued to manifest in a more insidious, neglectful colonising style or in more aggressive and overpowering ways, it prevented or at least obstructed the women from achieving equality, autonomy and agency within their post-separation shared parenting arrangements. The women also had the impact and losses of their pre-separation colonisation to contend with, in addition to their ex-partner's post-separation colonisation. Furthermore, the women were trapped by the incident/injury conceptualisation of domestic violence which does not match these women's experiences, and the pro-contact socio-legal responses to their situation.

Conceptualising the dynamics of domestic violence as a process of colonisation avoids the fragmentation of the women's experiences. It suggests a different legal, therapeutic and social response was needed for the women in this study. The findings of this research draw attention to the need to conceptualise domestic violence independently of physical violence and to consider the ramifications of this for women linked to ex-partners by post-separation parenting arrangements. The implications of conceptualising domestic violence in this manner are discussed in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this chapter I summarise the findings of this study in light of the initial aim, purpose and research questions outlined in Chapter One. The implications of the findings for the legal response to domestic violence, and social work knowledge and practice are then discussed.

This study was motivated by my experiences as a social work practitioner working with women and children who experienced challenging post-separation shared parenting arrangements. I became concerned at the inability of the socio-legal system to identify and protect women and children at risk of domestic violence post-separation particularly where physical and sexual violence was not occurring or able to be substantiated. The purpose of this study was to explore the links between women's experiences of domestic violence pre-separation and their shared parenting experiences. The aim was to highlight the implications of these links for women required to manage shared parenting arrangements with an ex-partner who used domestic violence. My initial research question investigated women's experiences of post-separation shared parenting within a context of domestic violence.

The findings of this study confirm existing studies on women's experiences of shared parenting in the context of domestic violence. It also offers different insights that extend our knowledge of women's lived experiences of domestic violence and the implications of these experiences post-separation. One of the key tenets of feminist standpoint theory guiding this research is that to get an understanding of the mechanics of oppression, it is necessary to ask those who are oppressed. Every woman in this study gave descriptions with concrete examples of systematic oppression both pre- and post-separation. If I had interviewed the partners about their relationship with the women in this study, it is unlikely I would have elicited this information. From what I understand of the dynamics of their relationships, the attitudes and behaviours of the male partners disempowered at the same time as blamed the women. Although they would have claimed as much abuse from the women had they been interviewed, their attitudinal and behavioural style would have prevented them from being fully aware of or able to speak of the concrete evidence of the women's systemic negation within the relationship.

If the male partners were viewing the relationship and the behaviour of the women through a colonising lens, the resistance of the women to the continual efforts of the male to engineer the women's accommodation (for example, to the imposition of the male's needs, standards, culture and customs) would have been regarded by the males on a continuum of inconvenient to outright abusive. It would have taken judicious questioning to uncover the concrete evidence of who in the relationship actually experienced systematic oppression in the form of exploitation of economic abuse, the subjugation of sexual abuse, the threat of physical abuse, the silencing of communication abuse, the isolation of social abuse and the alienation of defamation abuse.

As I gradually realised the significance of the women's endemic oppression, the orientation of my study shifted to the pre-separation dynamics of the relationship. Irrespective of whether the women had experienced physical violence from their partner, the dynamics common to all the women's relationships became the pivotal finding. I conceptualised the dynamics as a web of abuse, the core of which was their partner's attitudinal and behavioural style. It was clear that these dynamics extended post-separation.

There were significant consequences of being caught in this web. They included being subjected to double standards, double binds and a concerted pattern of boundary violations in every aspect of their relationship. The women experienced these dynamics in their physical and sexual relationship with their partner, their social and economic arrangements, their communication patterns and in their public portrayal.

Conceptualising domestic violence as a web of abuse shed light on the complexity of the experience of domestic violence and provided the framework for the analysis and reporting of the data. It was critical to understanding the women's descriptions of the impact of their pre-separation relationship and explained the women's responses. It highlighted the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the women's post-separation shared parenting and their pre-separation experiences. The full breadth and

depth of the women's post-separation difficulties were clearly the direct result of the web of abuse. The continued influence of their ex-partner's attitudinal and behavioural style was not limited to the specific features of their shared parenting arrangements but was visible in all aspects of their lives post-separation. John Muir captures the interrelationships and links both within and between the women's pre and post-separation relationship with his famous quote, 'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken, to everything else in the universe' (cited in Fox, 1981, p. 291).

There are several ways in which the findings of this study can extend our knowledge of the links between domestic violence and shared parenting arrangements. Initially, I will focus on the way we understand domestic violence.

First, the findings in this study suggests that defamation abuse should be added to psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, social, economic and verbal abuse, the forms that are currently included in definitions of domestic violence. Second, the form of abuse frequently described as 'verbal abuse' should be replaced by the term 'communication abuse', as this encompasses the nature and full extent of abuse within the full range of communication patterns. Third, the findings suggest that psychological and emotional abuse are at the centre of the web of abuse. They lead to the inevitable experience of every other form of abuse. Fourth, each form of abuse was experienced as chronic, overlapping and interrelated in the women's lives, which contradicts the notion of domestic violence as discrete incidents or episodes of abuse. Finally, the web of abuse suggests the need for a 'definitional stretching' (Stark, 2007, p. 85) and revision of each of these forms of abuse. For example, social abuse can be defined in terms of the consequences of psychological and emotional abuse within the women's social arrangements with their partners. Economic abuse refers to the consequences of psychological and emotional abuse within the women's economic arrangements with their partners, and so on.

A further strength of conceptualising domestic violence as a web of abuse is its ability to capture the specific role that physical violence plays within the dynamics of

domestic violence. The web of abuse explains the full range of double standards, double binds and boundary violations experienced by the women in their physical relationship with their partner (for example, the neglect and control of the women's needs for nutrition, sleep, well being, safety and autonomy) and describes these as physical abuse. It conveys physical violence as a potential and particular form of boundary violation within the physical relationship that was not experienced by every woman in this study. Those women who did experience physical violence from their partners reported that these incidents may have been rare, 'minor', or insufficient to meet legal criteria or the evidentiary requirements. Excluding women from legal protection on this basis minimises the extent of abuse they experienced from their partners.

The main conclusion of this study, however, is that the experience of domestic violence is parallel to a process of colonisation. Drawing this parallel emphasises those nuances of domestic violence which are lost in the more traditional terminology of forms of abuse.

The attitudinal and behavioural style associated with colonisation has an inevitable impact on every aspect of the relationships between the coloniser and the colonised. Understanding these impacts provides insight into the less visible, less articulated and therefore the less understood aspects of women's lived experiences. It avoids the fragmentation of their experiences and de-mystifies the impact on women of domestic violence. In this study it was clear that although a colonisation process potentially affected every area of the women's life, it was not always an outwardly aggressive process that included physical violence. The women's narratives suggested different styles of colonisation were used to engineer accommodation and compliance. These different styles were reflected in the diversity of experiences within each aspect of their relationship pre- and post-separation.

The process of colonisation also provides the context for understanding the links between the women's experience of domestic violence and their post-separation shared parenting experiences. The difficulties the women described post-separation

were the consequences of this pervasive and relentless pattern of boundary violations. The demands of shared parenting arrangements opened up new sites for colonisation, as the ex-partners continued to economically, socially, sexually, physically, verbally and publically colonise the women. In this context, the women in this study had a range of post-separation issues to deal with which emerged as they negotiated and facilitated shared parenting arrangements.

Post-separation, the ex-partners did not revert to a collaborative style that facilitated respect and independence. Instead, they took advantage of the new sites made available for colonisation by their involvement in the lives of their children. Some of the ex-partners had a colonising style characterised by ongoing or intermittent absences, and an inability or unwillingness to contribute time, economic or material support as a father. Some demanded 50 per cent parenting time but not 50 per cent responsibility. The women felt the rights of the father were seen as sacrosanct without any expectation that they should be responsible for their attitudes and behaviour.

The findings of this study thus extend our knowledge of the links between domestic violence and shared parenting arrangements. They suggest an additional focus is necessary to protect women and children post-separation from the risk of abuse and further oppression.

The following section outlines the implications for the socio-legal system and social work education and practice of conceptualising domestic violence as a web of abuse that can be paralleled to the process of colonisation.

Implications for the Socio-legal System

A universal theme for the women in this research was that despite any intervention from mediation, counsellors or the judiciary, they rarely had a voice in how the restoration of their lives post-separation was affected by post-separation shared parenting arrangements. The women in this study were disadvantaged post-separation by having to counter the colonising attitudes and behaviours of their ex-partners

without adequate support. Adding insult to injury was the focus on their ability to parent as a single mother. They were afraid of being accused of alienating the children from their father if they tried to set appropriate boundaries or raise concerns regarding the post-separation shared parenting arrangements or their ex-partner's parenting style. It can be argued that the failure of the socio-legal system to protect these women relates to a number of factors, including the use of a narrow definition of domestic violence, the challenges of assessing the complex dynamics inherent in domestic violence and the gaps in knowledge of effective interventions.

The definition of domestic violence determines the scope of the socio-legal response. A focus on physical violence narrows the scope and denies protection for many women affected by domestic violence within post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Even within this narrow focus the difficulty in legally validating physical or sexual violence places many women and children at further risk of abuse. Ignorance of the complexity of domestic violence and the full ramifications of living with any of the forms of abuse also leaves women vulnerable to oppression by the systems whose role is to protect them. This limited scope makes it impossible to accurately formulate more appropriate legal, therapeutic and social responses to all women and children in post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

The women in this study found the incident and injury based socio-legal response to domestic violence did not address the totality of their experiences. They believed that not all the forms of domestic violence can be seen or are treated as crimes. The recognition of domestic violence as a process of colonisation that may or may not include incidences of physical or sexual violence more appropriately matches their experiences. Colonisation of the women in this study conferred upon them an inferior citizenship, the full extent of which was unrecognised in court, counselling, mediations or parenting plans. Not one of the women had the full consequences of their relationship with their partners acknowledged by the legal system and certainly none of the partners was ever held accountable for the full range of boundary violations perpetrated upon the women. If domestic violence is conceptualised as a web of abuse and is likened to a colonising process, the tolerance of these 'unseen'

aspects of domestic violence by the legal system is challenged. The detrimental effects to women of being legally unable to extricate themselves from their coloniser post-separation are highlighted.

The women in this study affected by a more insidious colonising process were neglected and poorly understood. It can be argued that this is a troubled area for professionals and judiciary working in the field of family breakdown because of the challenges of determining whether conflict is in fact domestic violence. If there is a process of colonising in the relationship and the subordinate party is resisting, retaliating or defending themselves, it can appear as if there are interactional difficulties and high conflict unless the entire relationship is investigated. To make the assessments less challenging, an effective screening tool is needed. The development of an effective screening tool for colonising attitudes and behaviours towards women is also challenging, though, because of the similarity to 'constraints implicit in the normative enactment of gender roles' (Stark, 2007, p. 39). It also raises the question of where in a woman's experience of inequality, lack of autonomy and agency is legal intervention and protection warranted.

To address these issues, it is essential to accept that not all risk is related to the experience of physical or sexual violence. Some of the women in this study most at risk post-separation were those who did not experience physical violence within their pre-separation relationship. They were at risk of continuing harassment, monitoring, economic deceit and exploitation, social isolation, sexual disrespect, being silenced by oppressive communication patterns and being alienated by a campaign of public defamation. The colonising attitudinal and behavioural style of their ex-partner within shared parenting arrangements themselves hampered the women's ability to relate with, raise and protect their children. This oppressive style explains why the women felt unable to negotiate issues or concerns and were uneasy about the effects on the children of contact with their father. They wanted to protect their children but were also at risk of having their relationship with their children contaminated by the scapegoating and lack of respect inherent in colonising attitudes and behaviours.

It may also be important for the assessment process to be ongoing. This is to ensure that women who may not be aware of their situation, or are reluctant or unable to articulate various aspects of it are not left unprotected. Screening tools need to be able to identify the subtle, more underhand colonising style as well as the more overt and aggressive style, irrespective of the women's experience of physical violence.

Given the information we have on the legacy of domestic violence post-separation and the instability of post-separation parenting arrangements, there are still many gaps in our knowledge. Little is known about community responses that effectively help children and their mothers end not only physical or sexual violence (Williams et al., 2004) but the colonisation of their lives. There are limited processes to assess whether fathers have the capacity to parent safely as opposed to their universal rights to parent. It is essential to have the knowledge to determine whether a father who has been colonising pre-separation has the capacity to parent effectively and to understand the concerns of the mother in light of the pre-separation attitudes and behaviour he had subjected her to. This is clearly warranted in light of the recent reforms of the family law in Australia. A lack of evidence for physical violence does not ensure children are safe in shared parenting arrangements. Demonstrating a capacity for allowing a child to flourish in the wake of colonising attitudes and behaviours is also necessary.

In parallel to 'fathers rights' and children's best interests, there needs to be consideration given to the position and rights of mothers who have been subjected to colonising attitudes and behaviours when it comes to post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

Implications for the Social Work Profession

Social work practitioners are employed in a variety of settings where they encounter domestic violence issues. This includes counselling agencies and the network of family relationship centres set up by the Australian Government to help parents address post-separation shared parenting arrangements (Smyth, 2005). The recent

changes to the Federal family law system and the new Safe at Home legislation in Tasmania have generated complex issues for social workers. Not only are they mandated to report violence and abuse against children, they are also likely to work with women and children who do not fit with mandatory reporting requirements but are nevertheless oppressed in post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

The social work profession has a long-standing commitment to addressing the issues that arise from the existence of domestic violence in our society. However, until there is a consistent national approach to defining and responding to domestic violence, the risks to women and children of post-separation shared parenting arrangements other than physical or sexual violence remain unclear. It is important to realise the potential for the process of colonisation to cause problems in negotiating shared parenting arrangements. Learning to determine the sort of conflict which is symptomatic of a colonising process is a challenge. However, this is made easier when post-separation shared parenting issues are addressed in the context of a pre-separation relationship dominated by colonisation. This increases the ability of social work practitioners to formulate more appropriate social responses that include screening before interventions such as counselling and mediation are implemented.

Counselling Practice

A key contribution of this study is the dual recognition of the women as resisting yet being victimised by abuse and violence. It is important for counsellors to be able to recognise those relationships where the dynamics inherent in relationships dominated by colonising attitudes and behaviours create a stranglehold on the colonised person, no matter how they resist. The dynamics were weighed too heavily against the ability of the women in this study to ever achieve or maintain autonomy, agency and equality. The recognition of a stranglehold such as this redirects attention away from individual pathology or personality towards the attitudes and behaviours men can use to disempower and at the same time blame their female partners.

The web of abuse and its similarities with the process of colonisation suggests that a very different model of relationship counselling might benefit women who are still with a partner whom they describe as abusive, or have separated from. It may be more useful to focus on the process of colonisation rather than family of origin issues or personality characteristics to explore relationship issues. For example, women may benefit from a process that helps them explore how they felt colonised within their sexual and physical relationships, their economic and social arrangements, their communication patterns and in their public portrayal.

This focus allows a more inclusive approach to women's experiences and replaces the practice of emphasising the identification of forms of abuse or the legal criteria for physical and sexual violence. For example, being sexually colonised allows women no sense of their own sexual identity, wants or needs because they have to cater to those of their partner. Paying attention to the double standards, double binds and violations of their own needs, wants and boundaries in their sexual relationships allows a consideration of the impact of being colonised. It also assists women to identify the challenges of attempting a renegotiation of their sexual self-sovereignty.

Being colonised is arguably a deep process that goes beyond individual circumstances, stress levels, personality strengths, weaknesses or family of origin issues. From a counselling perspective, women who have been colonised may need to spend some time extracting or decolonising themselves, even after independence has been gained from the coloniser. In this study, further attempts by an ex-partner to bring a woman back under 'colonial rule' complicated the process of extraction. Naming and identifying aspects of domestic violence that have so far eluded detection assists women's ability to recognise the use of colonising tactics and justifications. A strong theme in this study was the challenge of escaping the relationships. Although the women resisted their ex-partner's domination, they often felt they had not known how to fully stand up to something they couldn't name, articulate or understand.

The impact of being colonised by the father of their children lingered for a long time in the women I interviewed. It emerged in their relationships with themselves, their children and significant others. Using an analogy of a colonisation process allows for a more thematic analysis of their relationship rather than trying to make sense of individual incidents and can hasten the process of restoration.

Further research that investigates the ways women resist colonisation and the benefits of using a therapeutic process underpinned by this model is suggested. Of further benefit to women in post-separation shared parenting arrangements would be research on how to engage fathers in a counselling process. Counselling techniques that can detect and disrupt the colonising attitudes and behaviours of fathers rather than collude with them are a vital skill in a pro- contact culture. They would be of direct benefit to both parents in post-separation shared parenting arrangements as well as the children.

Defining domestic violence as a colonisation process also suggests the need to revise the criteria for attendance at a ‘perpetrator’ program. From this perspective the course content would be aimed at ‘decolonising the coloniser’ (Lewis, 2001). A focus on physical violence as the result of difficulty with stress management, anger management, self-control or impulse control (Colarossi, 2005) would be replaced by a focus on the role physical violence plays within the entire colonising process.

Social Work Education

The web of abuse and the colonising process outlined in this study denied the women equality, autonomy and agency in every aspect of their relationship with their partner. They had similar experiences to those described by the women in Stark’s practice: their physical integrity was violated, their resources were appropriated, their social support undermined, and their rights to privacy, self respect and autonomy denied (Stark, 2007, p. 13). Those who uphold the idea of gender symmetry in domestic violence inflate the capacity of women to similarly entrap men.

A limited conceptualisation and understanding of domestic violence by social workers ‘obstructs overall social development’ (Stark, 2007, p. 13) as it weakens our ability as a profession to enhance the full citizenship of women. Colluding with the colonising attitudes and behaviours of men towards their female partners seriously undermines the ethics of our profession and its value for women and children at risk of abuse.

Thus, social work education needs to recognise domestic violence as a ‘cross-cutting issue’ rather than a specialty field of practice (Danis & Lockhart, 2003, p. 220). It would also benefit from differentiating domestic violence from a gender neutral understanding of family violence (Colarossi, 2005) and teaching it as a colonisation process that prevents the full citizenship of women. The gender symmetry research that has captured women’s use of physical violence within intimate relationships must be critiqued in terms of the context. This does not imply that women are not capable of violence unless provoked, or are simply retaliating or defending themselves. It does imply that it is simplistic to use statistics based on episodes of violence without understanding the underlying dynamics of the relationship. The analogy of a colonising process and the implication that there is a stranglehold by one person on the dynamics challenges those discourses on domestic violence that hinge on the experience of physical violence.

Working with dynamics does not override the importance of gender experience in domestic violence but it does challenge an emphasis on gender identity. The identification of the commonality of dynamics outlined in this study draws attention to the commonality of response and victimisation inherent in a situation where individuals, organisations or countries have a strangle hold on the dynamics between one another. This allows for an exploration of the colonising tactics and justifications used to prevent negotiation or collaboration, between any individual, organisation or country and therefore the evolution of the relationship into one that aims to meet the needs of both parties. This does not negate ‘post modernist concerns for diversity, difference and cultural relativity’ (Mullaly, 2002, p. x) but allows social work schools

to emphasize an anti-oppressive social work practice framework that addresses social structures and policies that are oppressive to people of any gender, race or class.

Social Work Research

The social work profession has as its focus individuals and groups of people who have been marginalized, distressed and possibly traumatised. Before a research project is conducted, approval must be sought from the appropriate Human Ethics Research Committee. This entails outlining how participants will be protected from harm. As a profession, the knowledge and practice of 'trauma stewardship' (van Denoot Lipsky, 2009) should be an additional requirement for researchers who intend to interview participants where traumatic issues may arise or are indeed the focus of the project. I suggest in Chapter Three that a further duty of care is the need to formulate social work guidelines and practice that highlight the need to anticipate, prepare for and respond to the effects of trauma on research participants. The capacity of the social work researcher to leave participants in a 'better' state for having told their stories rather than merely seeking a 'recovered' state seems an appropriate ethical commitment.

In addition, it is imperative that social work guidelines and practice are developed for the researcher who explores the traumatic and painful experiences of others. On a practical level, such guidelines would be used to anticipate and prepare for the stress reactions of researchers in order to minimise them and prevent researcher inefficiency. More importantly, such guidelines would be used to foster the growth and transformation possible from undertaking such a project when there are clear signposts with which to navigate the terrain.

Limitations of the Study

In seeking an in-depth understanding of domestic violence, this study has several strengths. The sample group of 30 women enabled an exploration of a diverse range of experiences. Careful recruitment strategies facilitated the inclusion of women 'hard

to access' for research on domestic violence. The stories of women who had not experienced physical violence facilitated another lens through which to contribute an understanding of women's lived experience of domestic violence. Careful interviewing techniques paid attention to containing and responding to the women's trauma and provided rich and extensive data on their lives.

There are several features of this study that limit its scope. Although 30 participants is a large sample size for a qualitative in-depth study, it is small in comparison to quantitative studies. As the sample of women was not selected randomly or systematically, a limitation of this study is that their experiences cannot be considered representative of the population of women engaged in post-separation shared parenting arrangements in the context of domestic violence. The goal of this qualitative research, however, was not to generalise the findings of this study to other contexts (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 207). This study was guided by feminist standpoint theory and aimed for contributing to a 'fusion of horizons' (Nielson, 1990, p. 29) between the diversity of women's standpoint on shared parenting and domestic violence. This study can be used to form a basis from which to understand studies in other situations (Schofield, 1993) and to contribute to theory building (Alston & Bowles, 1998) from a feminist perspective.

Although the participants in this study lived in all regions of Tasmania and were of diverse age, education and socio-economic backgrounds, an unintended consequence of the recruiting strategies of this study was that no self-identified indigenous or disabled women volunteered and there were only three women from a culturally and linguistic diverse background. Given the avoidance of a focus on physical violence, this did not negatively affect the identification of a commonality of dynamics. However, a limitation of this study is that it is unable to address the relevance of applying these dynamics to the experiences of indigenous, disabled or culturally and linguistically diverse women either pre- or post-separation.

A further consequence of the recruiting strategies of this study is the inability to explore the experience of women of indigenous descent in Australia, or for women of

minority ethnicity, of multi-layered colonisation. The potential for and ramifications for women of being colonised by an intimate partner in addition to their experience of cultural colonisation cannot be addressed in this study.

One of the criteria for eligibility was being separated for two years. The open-ended nature of this criterion may pose a limitation. This study could not focus on a particular stage of separation (for example, two to five years) in order to systematically trace the effects of domestic violence on post-separation parenting. Similarly, the inclusion of the whole spectrum of shared parenting arrangements in this study prevents a closer analysis of the issues created by domestic violence particular to the different shared parenting arrangements.

Implications for Future Research

This study has addressed the influence which the definition of domestic violence has had in understanding women's experiences of post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

The traditional definition of domestic violence underlies previous research in the field. It excludes the experiences of women who do not match or are outside the definition of domestic violence used to structure the research process. Such research has been used to formulate socio-legal responses to domestic violence. To protect all women and children, defining which experiences are considered to be part of domestic violence needs careful and urgent consideration. The findings of this study suggest future possibilities for research in the area of domestic violence as well as post-separation shared parenting arrangements. Conceptualising domestic violence independently of physical violence and as a colonising process challenges the literature on women's experiences of domestic violence.

The findings of this study challenge the research that has privileged the experience of physical violence as a criterion for eligibility. Second, the web of abuse described in this study implies there are no experiential boundaries between each form of abuse in

domestic violence. They overlap and merge in women's lives because of the centrality of psychological and emotional abuse. From this perspective, researching any of the forms of abuse should take into consideration its place in the whole web of abuse. This challenges the benefit of fragmenting domestic violence into forms of abuse and challenges the assumption that these forms of abuse can be independently researched for their effects on women. The web of abuse also suggests greater scope for researching the different nuances of each form of abuse, which has direct implications for the better representation of women's lived experiences and a national understanding of domestic violence.

Future research could focus on women's experiences of being physically, sexually, economically, socially, verbally and publically colonised in context of an overall process of colonisation within domestic violence. The literature on the effects of abuse and domestic violence on women would include a focus on the impacts on women and their responses to the process of being colonised, as well as the process of healing and restoring their lives. Useful links between this and post-colonial theoretical writings on the particular experiences of women can also be drawn.

Given the inability of this study to focus on the experiences of women of aboriginal descent, or of minority ethnicity, future research is warranted on the potential and ramifications for such women experiencing an interpersonal colonising process from an intimate partner in addition to the transgenerational consequences of colonisation (Atkinson, 2002) and the ongoing colonising process of the dominant culture. This is of particular concern given the implication of such a multi-layered colonisation process on a woman's life. Whereas the focus of the data analysis in this study was on the dynamics of the women's relationship dynamics, this has been at the expense of the analysis and theorising of the women's strength, resilience and stages of restoration or healing from such a colonising process. Such research could also be located within and draw from current post-colonial research on healing and restorative processes such as those posited by Atkinson (2002) within 'Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and acting in the world' (Atkinson, 2002, p. 24).

The findings of this research explain the women's difficulties with shared parenting as being the result of such a colonising process extending into their post-separation life. This also challenges the post-separation shared parenting research in several ways.

First, it challenges the research that has privileged the experience of physical violence as the eligibility criteria for legal protection. The findings of research which focuses on the legal response to women negotiating post-separation shared parenting issues and the experiences of women in any form of supervised or supervised post-separation shared parenting arrangement relate only to women who have experienced physical violence. The findings of this study challenge the current legal tolerance of post-separation oppression in women because of a legal response based on such studies. Future research is required which uses broader criteria for sampling criteria in order to formulate a more appropriate legal response to domestic violence and shared parenting issues.

Second, it challenges research which isolates the experience of post-separation shared parenting from the context of the women's entire experience of domestic violence. Future research is suggested which takes a more holistic approach towards the full impact on women post-separation when their lives include shared parenting arrangements.

Third, it challenges the lack of research into the patterns and cycles of shared parenting issues that can potentially affect women over their entire parenting career. This suggests the need for research into the way women and children can be subjected to a range of neglectful, capricious, ad hoc, unsafe and untenable shared parenting arrangements as a result of the colonising attitudinal and behavioural style of the father.

In light of the controversy centering on the benefits and risks to women of screening tools for complex psychosocial issues such as domestic violence (Taft, 2002), it is clearly difficult to establish a screening tool that is not only acceptable to women and

practitioners, yet also rigorous and pragmatic and able to strike a balance between ‘the rights of individual citizens and the population health responsibilities of government and its agencies...’ (Taft, 2002, p. 11).

Bearing such tensions in mind, further research could be warranted in creating screening tools that incorporate an expanded conceptualisation of domestic violence that addresses the parallel to a pre and post-separation colonisation process irrespective of incidents of physical violence. Such a screening tool could at the least be useful in pre and post-separation contexts by practitioners on which to base their direct inquiry of a woman or an exploration of a woman’s experience of the dynamics of her relationship, in order to detect a possible colonisation process. If used in conjunction with Wuest and Merrit-Gray’s (2001, p. 91) ideas on assessment for abuse that identifies the various stages of leaving, assistance could be tailored to ‘needs associated with that stage’.

It is also important to explore how these dynamics can be disrupted in women’s lives. Where a context of colonisation has been established in a woman’s life, regardless of physical violence, research is necessary to investigate ways of supporting those women who are required to interact with an ex-partner because of post- separation shared parenting arrangements (Williams et al., 2004). This is essential to prevent ongoing oppression. Women who facilitate supervised and unsupervised shared parenting arrangements without support are at risk of post-separation colonisation through the links with the children.

In terms of gender based violence, this study is able to provide information on the dynamics of the women’s relationship with their male partner. The obvious implication is that whereas it was the male partners in this study who had the stranglehold on the dynamics and conferred an inferior citizenship upon the women, this does not deny the possibility that women would also be capable of exerting a chronic stranglehold on the dynamics of an intimate relationship with a male or female partner in a similar way. Research into the presence of colonising attitudes and behaviours by women which create a stranglehold on the dynamics of an intimate

relationship could be useful, provided it is able to provide concrete evidence of how their male or female partner was denied equality, autonomy or agency in all areas of the relationship. Such research could provide further insights into the more gender neutral concept of family violence.

Finally, a critical issue warranting urgent investigation is how the process of colonisation impacts on children. The main concern of the women in this study was their ability to raise and protect their children in the face of the obstacles created by the colonisation process of their ex-partners. For example, the avoidance of economic responsibility and defamation intruded on the mother's economic stability and the mother-child relationship. The process of colonising children also needs to be explored both in the pre-separation context and in post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

Concluding Comments to the Chapter

This study evolved from my experiences as a practitioner working with women in post-separation shared parenting arrangements during the time the new family law reforms were being implemented in Australia. It is a response to my perception of the haphazard professional, research and legal links made between the issues that often arose for women in negotiating and facilitating these arrangements and a context of domestic violence. The main conclusions address the influence the definition of domestic violence has on the ability to draw these links and prevent the legacy of domestic violence extending into the lives of women with children in post-separation shared parenting arrangements.

The findings of this study have generated a conceptualisation of domestic violence as a colonising process that does not necessarily include physical violence.

The value of this is that it captures the different nuances of women's experiences of shared parenting and describes them as part of a process of colonisation which it is difficult to escape. The post-separation colonising efforts of their ex-partners created

a variety of obstacles to successful shared parenting arrangements, particularly given the new family law reforms.

The complex decisions and challenges faced by the women in this study revolved around how to navigate these colonising efforts without being seen to interfere in the children's relationship with their fathers. The expectation to share the parenting post-separation in a context of domestic violence created double standards and double binds and further oppression for the women in this study. The cost to women of being colonised post-separation suggests the need for intervention. In this study, unless the post-separation colonising efforts of their ex-partners were detected and/or disrupted in some way, it led to the possibility of a second class and defeated future for the women.

The conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest that critical to the anti-oppressive practice of professionals in the field of domestic violence is their ability to detect and disrupt colonising attitudes and behaviours. Collusion with such attitudes and behaviours places women and children at further risk of abuse. Yet understanding the dynamics underlying domestic violence allows the formulation of socio-legal policies and practices that can facilitate non-oppressive shared parenting arrangements.

Appendix A: Pamphlet

What if you were never hit?

I would really like to talk with women who are not sure if they experienced what is called physical violence, or experienced what they would consider minor incidents of physical violence, if any physical violence at all.

Your stories as well as those of women who were physically or sexually assaulted and may have needed hospital treatment are equally as important to this research.

I would be grateful if you would all share your experiences with me.

What is meant by contact?

'Contact' means when children have spent time with their father since their parents' separation.

It may be or have been court ordered supervised or unsupervised contact, or any kind of private contact arrangement.

I would like to talk with women who feel that the contact between their children and ex-partner is (or was) successful, as well as women who feel that women who have found contact difficult.

What would you have to do?

Your involvement would consist of being interviewed once by me for a period of one to two hours, at a time and place convenient to you. This would be tape recorded if you agreed.

You may feel more comfortable with an interview by telephone; that's fine too.

Your contact with me would be treated respectfully and with the utmost confidentiality. No identifiable information would be given in the results of this study. If you would rather remain anonymous you are welcome to use another name during our contact.

If you would like to share your story with me, or need more information, I would love to hear from you!! You can;

1. Phone **63 243 594** (this is a shared office so if you get someone else or the answering machine, please leave your number for me to return your call)
2. Ring me direct on my mobile **0448 371 760** or text / leave a message with your phone number
3. Email **Domestic.Bliss@utas.edu.au**.

Thanking you and best wishes

Michele Signey
2007



**UNIVERSITY
OF TASMANIA**
School of Sociology and Social Work

An invitation for women to participate in research

I would like to interview women who have shared the parenting of children in some way with a male ex-partner who had used abusive or abusive and violent behaviours towards them

What is this research about?

Research on the effects of abuse and abuse with violence has shown that being subjected to regular intimidation or control can negatively affect the wellbeing of those who experience it.

Women have expressed feelings of fear, powerlessness, confusion, depression and 'going crazy' in such a relationship.

Much less information is available about how women rebuild their lives two years or more after such a relationship has ended. This is especially the case when they have or have had children who continued to see their father.

This research seeks to learn from the experiences of women in this position. The results will be written up as a PhD thesis and used to raise awareness and provide information to the community about ways to meet the needs of and support women with children after the experience of an abusive relationship.

Who is doing this research?

My name is Michele Signey and I am a PhD Candidate in the School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania, Launceston.

I have worked with women both as a teacher and relationship counsellor.

I am interested in the experiences of women who have children in post-separation contact with their father when there has been a background of abuse that may have included violence. As an extension of my work and interest in this area I am now focusing on the issues that are important to women in this situation.

Of particular interest to me is to understand what hinders or helps women to create a new life for themselves and their children after separation and how they can be supported.

I am working with Prof. Robert Bland who is the Head of the School and the Chief Investigator for this project.

Who are the women I want to talk with?

- Women who have been separated for over 2 years from the father of their children;
- Women who experienced abuse or abuse and violence
- Women who have or have had children in contact with their father since their separation
- Women who currently live in Tasmania.

Were you subjected to abuse or abuse and violence?

It can be confusing to know whether your experiences would be labelled as abusive or even violent and at what point these experiences can or should be described as domestic violence. This is a broader definition of domestic violence that can help you to decide if your ex-partner was abusive or abusive and violent towards you;

'Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly by men against women both in relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts to

physically or psychologically to dominate or control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation' (Access Economics, 2004).



Appendix B: Sample of Letter to Participants



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“Domestic Bliss and Other Myths”

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research! I have enclosed the pamphlet and information sheet for you to read and there is a copy of the consent form that I ask participants to sign with me before our interview actually starts.

The Information Sheet is very long! I had to include all the information a woman might need to know so that she is fully informed.

I have also included a copy of the interview schedule which gives you some idea of the questions I am likely to ask. It is only really a guide to our conversation, though. The first question I will probably ask you in the interview is to tell me about your relationship with the father of your children. After that I will just be guided by what you say and have a conversation with you about how you have found life since separating, including how you found parenting with your ex-partner.

I look forward to meeting with you and I am very grateful to you for giving up your time to do this interview.

Yours sincerely,

Tone Pitman

(Tone is pronounced „Torna”)

Appendix C: Information Sheet



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Information Sheet

Title of Project

Domestic Bliss and Other Myths: Exploring the lives of women who share the parenting of children with an ex-partner who used abusive or abusive and violent behaviours

Who is involved in this study?

My name is Tone (pronounced Torna) Pitman and I am a teacher and counsellor. I am completing my post graduate studies in Social Work as a PhD student through the University of Tasmania. I have chosen this area of research because of my interest in and counselling work with women who have experienced domestic violence from a male partner. It is being completed under supervision of the Chief Investigator, Professor Robert Bland, Head of the Social Work Discipline of the University of Tasmania.

Why is this research being done?

I am very interested in what life is like for women when they have been separated for longer than two years from an ex-partner who used abusive or abusive and violent behaviours. Little is known about the longer term issues for women in this situation, particularly when the children remain in contact with their father. I would like to explore with women how this affects their lives after they have separated and what is needed to be understood about the links between abuse, abuse and violence and post-separation shared parenting issues. I am doing this research so that community and counselling support as well as relevant policies can be improved.

What does this research involve?

If you would like to be involved in the research I will be asking you to participate in an interview with me of around 1 or 2 hours duration. The location and the time of the interview can be arranged to suit us both. The questions I will be asking you are on the interview schedule in the information package you have received from me. However, in interviews, the questions often get answered in no particular order as the person is telling their story. These questions and the interview both aim to give you time to reflect on issues, challenges and

victories as a mother and a woman and so that you can tell your own story of life since you have separated. With your permission, your interview will be audio recorded. This will be typed up and a copy will be sent to you to check if there is anything you would like to add, change or remove before I use it in the research. I will also provide you with a summary of the final report when it is completed.

Who is eligible to participate in this research?

You are welcome to participate if:

1. You feel you were subjected to abuse that may have included violence in your relationship with your ex-partner.
2. Your relationship ended 2 or more years ago.
3. Your ex-partner has or has had court ordered supervised or unsupervised contact of any type with the children, or he has or has had contact with the children under private rather than court ordered arrangements.
4. You currently reside in Tasmania.

Please be aware that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without having to explain why.

How to express interest in participating

You can ring me on my mobile or email me to discuss the research further or clarify any concerns. You can also contact Yemaya or She (listed below) and leave a name and contact number on the answering machine or speak to the workers and tell them you would like to participate in this study. They will forward your details to me and I will contact you. If you feel happy to participate, we can organise an interview place and time that is safe and convenient for you. Your contact with me will be treated respectfully and with confidentiality at all times. I will travel to your location in Tasmania.

What are the possible risks?

This research is concerned with four possible risks to you. These are; the protection of your confidentiality as a participant so that the information you give me is kept private; the protection of your anonymity so that the information you give me cannot be identified by anyone who reads or hears about the research findings; your safety from an ex-partner who may detect your involvement and object to it and finally, any feelings of distress that you might experience during the interview when you are telling your story or after the interview process as a result of telling your story.

Protecting your confidentiality and privacy

I will be conducting all of the interviews myself. The majority of the interviews will be transcribed in the privacy of my office on the Launceston University Campus. Only my supervisor, chief investigator and a transcriber will view the raw data collected. If a transcriber is used for your interview, she will provide me with a confidentiality agreement.

All transcripts, recordings of interviews and discs will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer on Launceston University Campus. All raw data will be wiped or shredded and destroyed after five years.

Protecting your anonymity

I will take several steps to ensure that no one will be able to identify you as a participant and that you will remain anonymous. Your interview and transcript will be given a false name, or you can choose one. Your consent form will be kept separately from your transcript. Although I will ask you for your age, contact arrangements, number of children including their ages now and when separation occurred, these details will be stored and reported separately from your transcript i.e. presented as grouped demographic data. No links will be possible from this data to the individual participant interviews. To prevent any one being able to identify you when either reading the completed thesis or future articles, or by hearing about the findings such as in a conference, any identifying information such as names, and incidences will be removed from the transcripts and you are invited to further edit and omit data you think may identify you. The final report will be written so that no individual accounts are directly used but a list of the main themes from all the participants will be selected and presented. Short individual quotes will also be used to support these themes. The quotes will have all identifying information removed such as demographics or recognisable events and incidences.

Safety from an ex-partner

If you experienced abuse or abuse and violence in your relationship, you may be in the situation of fearing further abuse or violence now, despite having been separated for two years. Yet you may still really want to tell your story. This could create the potential for a dangerous research environment for both you and even myself if your ex-partner detects your involvement and objects to the research topic. I need to address this in order for this research to have a high level of accountability to you. As I work as a counsellor, I am accustomed to being mindful of the safety of my clients.

If you contact me (or Yemaya or She) to tell me you are interested in participating, we will discuss how we can arrange interview times and places without there being any possibility of being detected by your ex-partner or any of his friends, or violating your confidentiality. Interviews may be safer in a public place like the University of Tasmania, a library meeting room or one of the support services for women, rather than in your home. If you leave me a message, outline a safe procedure or time for me to return the call if one is necessary. Safe procedures for any further necessary telephone contact, a way for you to have access to your transcript for comment when completed as well as the summary of results will be negotiated together. If you think the transcript is safe to be sent to you, it will be important for us to consider how to keep the transcript private for the length of time that you take to check it and make your comments before sending it back to me.

Feelings of distress

If you do feel uncomfortable, anxious or upset in the interview, you are welcome to stop the interview and turn off the recorder. You can then decide whether you just need a break, would like to change the topic, finish the interview or even withdraw from the research. I work as a counsellor with many women and children affected by domestic violence and I am sure I can interview you in a sensitive and respectful manner where you feel supported and safe if you do feel any distress or strong emotions.

There are some free support services in Tasmania specifically for women who are in or have left an abusive relationship. These services are aware of and support the fact that I am conducting this research. They will be available to you if you would like to speak to another counsellor by telephone or face to face at some stage after your interview.

Yemaya Women's Support Service
Launceston Ph 63340305

She (Support, Help & Empowerment)
Hobart Ph 62789090

As well, there are general services for counselling that are available;

Centacare
Launceston 63319253
Hobart 62781660

Anglicare
Launceston 63346060
Hobart 62343510

Statement regarding approval

Ethics Approval was granted for this research (Reference No: H8692) from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network on 22nd March 2006

Who else can I contact if I have any queries or concerns?

If you have any concerns about this project or the way that it is being conducted you can contact Amanda McAully, Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 2763 or via email Amanda.McAully@utas.edu.au. You are also welcome to discuss this project with my supervisor and Chief Investigator Professor Robert Bland. He is available on (03) 63243528 or via email Robert.Bland@utas.edu.au. For general queries or if you would like to contact me to participate, I am available via email Domestic.Bliss@utas.edu.au or on mobile number 0448371760. You may also leave a message and instructions with Yemaya or She for me to contact you. A statement of informed consent will be made available to all women who wish to participate.

Thanks for taking the time to read this information

Torna Pitman
PhD Candidate (School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania)

Appendix D: Statement of Informed Consent



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Domestic Bliss and Other Myths: Exploring the lives of women sharing children with an ex-partner who used abusive or violent behaviours

1. I have read and understood the „Information Sheet’ for this study and will be provided with a copy of this signed „Statement of Informed Consent.’
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves the following procedures:
 - Participation in an audio-taped interview of 1-2 hours or more duration with the researcher;
 - The possibility of transcription of the recording by a transcriber;
 - The opportunity to verify, edit and comment on the transcripts of the interview;
 - A thematic analysis of the stories told in interviews;
 - The publication of the results in a final report;
 - Distribution of the final report to several assessors and possible publication;
 - The opportunity to access summaries of the final report.
4. I understand that should I feel uncomfortable or upset during the interview that I can stop and/or withdraw at any time. I have also been provided with information regarding appropriate emotional support if I require it as the result of the interview process.
5. I understand that the research data will be treated as confidential.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for at least five years, and will be destroyed when no longer required.
7. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

8. I understand the safety measures that have been taken to protect me from possible negative ramifications of participating in this study, including the use of the pseudonym by the researcher.
9. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.

10. I agree to participate in this study and understand that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice. I may also request that any information I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of participant:.....

Signature of participant:.....

Date:.....

Statement by Investigator

I, the researcher, have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this participant and I believe their consent is informed and that she understands the implications of participation.

Name

Date.....

Appendix E: Interview Questions



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Demographic Questions

- Pseudonym
- Age
- Nationality
- Occupation
- Length of separation
- Length of relationship
- Number of children
- Ages at separation
- Features of post-separation contact e.g. location, frequency, duration.

The pre-separation relationship

Tell me about your relationship with the father of your children

What did you find abusive?

How would you describe the overall relationship?

How would you describe any changes in you during the relationship?

e.g. your physical, emotional or mental health, family life, parenting

The post-separation relationship

Tell me about life since you have been separated from the father of your children

How would you say your life is/has been influenced by the post-separation contact arrangements?

How has family life and parenting been over the years since separating?

How would you describe the inner journey you have been on since the end of your relationship?

How have you addressed any obstacles you have faced?

What hopes and dreams do you now hold for your future?

What /who has been helpful/unhelpful for you in post separation contact arrangements?

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