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In search of possibilities : Informal responding to domestic violence

Marilyn Palmer
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In search of possibilities: Informal responding to domestic violence

The study of the common condition and the uncovering of the uncommon response become the warp and woof of the fragile but not threadbare sociological skein of the postmodern era. (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 61)

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March 2005

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis is based on a feminist ethnography, designed to explore how we as members of informal networks (family, social, student/work and neighbourhood networks) can respond usefully where there is domestic violence. Here, *domestic violence* refers to violence against women by their intimate partners and I have filtered the various discourses which seek to explain domestic violence through the lens of a *feminist ecological model*.

The inquiry process has been informed by a postmodern feminism. Non-foundationalist ideas about knowledge have influenced the gathering, interpretation and representation of the research data. The ideas which emanate from the study have been informed by the view that language, embodied and as text, plays a pivotal role in shaping how we live in the world and how we socially construct our world through interactions with others. The ways in which particular discourses govern what it is possible for us to say and do around domestic violence have been a focus for the study.

The thesis document is constructed as a narrative of the research endeavour where the end point of the story is known in advance and the purpose of the telling reflects, among other things, the interests and values of the teller. As well as framing the document as a narrative, I have used a set of questions based on *phronesis* (an Aristotelian-inspired approach to analysis and planning) to re-present the outcomes of the study. The text is interspersed with poetic representations of ethnographic data and fragments of a *harrikan's chorus*, which erupts as outbursts of outrage and irony, to unsettle my rational researcher voice. Portrayals of some of the research participants' narratives interleave with chapters of the document.

Sixteen people participated directly in the research project: women who had been abused by their male partners; men who had been abusive towards their wives, and men and women who had witnessed domestic violence through their family, friendship or neighbourhood networks. Interview transcripts formed the most substantial part of the data for the study. The transcripts were analysed to locate emergent themes and then revisited in order to explore narrative content and form. The other principal source of data for the study was an archive of brochures on domestic violence. The brochures were analysed using a Foucauldian-style *archaeology* in order to explore/expose the discourses surrounding state-sponsored responses to domestic violence. My journal of experiences as a practitioner and researcher also has been a source of data for the study.

In working with the data from the study, I intentionally privileged the voices of the women who had lived with violence and allowed the testimonials of their experiences to influence and guide me as I analysed the data through thematic analysis and the process of writing. The outcomes of the study suggest that domestic violence is a highly complex and contradictory experience for those intimately involved as victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses. The study found that many of the academic, professional and *everyday* discourses about domestic violence in Western Australia privilege particular ways of understanding and responding to the problem, which may be limited and limiting for the people most intimately involved. For example, the *victim to survivor* journey metaphor which underpins many of the formal responses, restricts the gaze to victims of violence and limits the possibilities for responding.

Feminist principles urge the activist researcher to make research useful, so I have made suggestions about alternative practices, identity categories and spatialities which may be useful for responding to domestic violence. For example, to honour the complexity of the lives of women living with domestic violence, in particular their decisions to stay in or leave violent relationships, I have proposed a metaphor of migration. Altman (2001) defines migration as a process 'in search of possibilities'. The migratory journey (with all its tentativeness, uncertainty, risks, dangers and enticements to return home) seems an appropriate metaphor for thinking about what is involved and what can be done to facilitate the journeys away from domestic violence that men and women try to make.

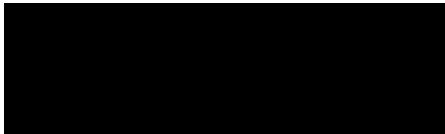
Thus, the thesis document offers a rich and thickly described representation of responding to domestic violence in the context of the everyday, the home and the neighbourhood.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

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11 November 2005

(date)

Acknowledgments

There are many people to whom I am indebted for the opportunity to write and present this story about researching informal responses to domestic violence.

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Carol Purden provided professional editing assistance with language and consistency of expression. She approached the thesis with the goal of making the document accessible to a wide audience and her work is sincerely appreciated.

Finally, I am indebted to Lottie Palmer and Kris, Kate and Jessica Csillag for their patience, love and care.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Lottie and Roger Palmer who gave me the opportunity to story my childhood as loving and non-violent. This has been both a gift and a burden, but the gift to me has far outweighed the burden.

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Prologue: Coming into the research project

A woman in trouble these days will find rather more practical help than the vague consoling sisterhood there used to be - if only, I suspect, because so many of the friendlier, softer left of the women's movement have gone off to be peace women at Greenham, on the grounds that if you are working towards a world in which women are free you had better make sure, first, there is a world. But nothing, of course, is wholly good, and their less easily distracted sisters point out, with some justice, that thus stressing the traditional image of the gentle, nurturing, peace-loving woman must be counter-productive in the long run. Myself, I think we'd better get through the short run first, somehow, anyhow, and then return to the principle when we can better afford it. (Weldon, 1984, p. 354)

Two decades on, Fay Weldon's analysis, which illustrates the paradoxical choices many women face about their activist practice, still has currency. The women may have left Greenham Common but we are no closer to peace with one another and with the environment than we were then. If anything, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the Bali bombing in 2002, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the daily killing of women and children by their male partners and kin across the globe, non-violence as a new hegemony seems further away than ever. In the study, I have tried to think creatively about strategies for responding where there is domestic violence, from a place marginally dis/located in relation to the places where academic ideas usually are formed; that is from a community in regional/rural Western Australia.

Several key thinking and practice elements of my history which form part of the history to this study. They help explain my interest in the topic and suggest why I thought the study might be a useful thing to do.

Firstly, I have a sense of myself as a critical social worker (K. Healy, 2000), active in my family, community practice and academic roles. I gained a renewed enthusiasm for social work through a Masters research project where I applied the theoretical framework of radical ecology¹ to social work practice in the area of domestic violence. I suggested then that a radical ecological model of social work would foreground issues to do with civil society, radical democracy, spirituality, community as relationships, co-operation and non-violence, as key elements in any emancipatory and transformative social change processes.

Secondly, I have an enduring optimism in the potential of human agency and emancipatory action to change the social systems in which we live, even though I recognise that social systems, by virtue of their structure and processes, limit the extent to which we usefully can think of individuals as purposive and active agents (Eisenstein, 1991). However, social work has long recognised the essential struggle “between the determinist theories of human action and the commonsense notion of agency and personhood” (Clark & Asquith, 1985, p. 9). Thus, social work lends itself as an appropriate space from which to explore our capacity to change our social environment to one where non-violence and co-operation, rather than domination and oppression, are normative.

Thirdly, I used a co-operative inquiry process for the Masters project, where the participants, as co-researchers, owned much of the research process and product (Reason, 1988).² This experience had taken me firmly into the realm of constructed, deconstructed and contested meanings and realities. In order to navigate my way through the research process, I had used some ideas from postmodernism/post-

¹ Radical ecology is a broad term which brings under one umbrella a number of conflicting (but not necessarily contradictory) ideas about environmental care such as deep ecology, social ecology and ecofeminism (Merchant, 1992).

² Reason (1988) noted however, that when a research project is undertaken as part of a degree program, the ownership is never shared fully.

structuralism to understand and work with the participants' different experiences with and constructions of domestic violence as a social problem. For example, early in the process, the co-researchers had insisted that we take the focus off *those people out there* who are labelled victim/survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence and turn our attention to ourselves as past and potential victim/survivors and perpetrators of violence. Participants also had refused to adopt uncritically my structural feminist conceptualisation of domestic violence. They had insisted that we hold some tensions around how we understand domestic violence (for example, that violence is embedded in systems of domination and oppression other than patriarchy; that women can be violent too) while we were developing our radical ecological model of social work practice.

The Masters inquiry process helped me to develop some understanding of the highly contested notion of community. Through the co-operative inquiry process (where we met as a group several times over five months), we began to experience ourselves as a community in line with Peck's (1987) notion of a group of people moving in and out of the experiences of pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness and community. We constructed ourselves individually as capable of violence and collectively as members of a society which largely condones or ignores violence in families, schools, organisations, social policy and our international relations. We came to see the experience of community (defined as relationships enacted within a set of core values) as a possible antidote to violence and so positioned *the community* as the basis of our radical ecological model of practice (Palmer, 1997).

Finally, I have a strong practice and theoretical interest in community development as a social work process. As an employee, parent and active citizen in my local community and neighbourhood, I have tried to use community development ideas, processes and skills (Ife, 2001a; A. Kelly & Sewell, 1988) to participate in what I optimistically view as sites of resistance to the oppressive structures of an overdeveloped, capitalist, patriarchal society. These sites variously include the local school; networks of family, friends and work colleagues; and the Greens as a political party and a social movement.

According to Diers (cited in H. Wilson, 1995), “once you are in the right frame of mind, practice research questions will find you” (p. 4). By the time I had completed my Masters research project in 1997, I had the beginnings of some ideas about the potential of community to respond to the problem of domestic violence. I was starting to experience the impact of a conservative, state-centric ideology, in particular economic rationalism, corporatisation and managerialism, in my own community and workplace and to read and hear about its impact in other areas of social work. The research question of how communities might respond to domestic violence through processes of informal helping had found me.

Preface: Introducing the thesis document

This thesis document tells a story. It is the story of my experiences and practices of gathering, interpreting and deconstructing various texts around the topic of domestic violence. A major part of the story involves 16 other people talking about their experiences and practices as men and women living with domestic violence. Some lived with the violence in their own families and others witnessed it in other families. Some did both. Most of these people told me what had happened to them by telling me stories. Their stories were about how they had experienced violence perpetrated against them or their children; about how they had used violence against their partners; and about how some of them had tried to intervene when they became aware that there was violence next door or up the road. According to Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997):

We might think of narrative as a bundle of elements useful in storying - structures, points of view, spatial and temporal devices, characters, plots, themes, and, of course, a narrator or narrators. The particular version of the story is located in some partial knowledge so we cannot say that narrative reflects a *reality* but we can say that, with the help of the reader, narrative produces meaning and *creates a version of reality*. The reader participates vicariously - living in the experience figured through narrative rather than standing on its periphery. (p. 65) [emphasis in the original]

This thesis document is my narrative about other people's narratives. It reflects my version of their versions of reality, and does this by drawing on Labov and Waletzky's *evaluation model* of narrative analysis (cited in Cortazzi, 1993; Olstedal, 2002). The evaluation model suggests a way of interpreting the narratives which often appear in research interviews in response to prompts or questions by a researcher. The model identifies six elements which generally appear when a person tells a story, although

according to Cortazzi (1993), the elements do not always appear in the same order, and occasionally, one or two of the elements will be missed out. The elements are:

- an abstract which summarises the story;
- an orientation which sets the scene for the story;
- a complicating action which is the turning point of the story (that is, the event/s on which the story hinges);
- an evaluation which is the teller's answer to the unspoken *So what?* question;
- the result or resolution which tells how the story ends; and
- a coda which indicates that the story has come to a close and the teller is moving on (Cortazzi, 1993; Oltedal, 2002).

Labov and Waletzky found that a useful way of analysing narratives was to identify and consider the *evaluation* component of the story. If you could discern the teller's answer to the unspoken *So what?*, you had found the essence of the storyteller's interpretation of the narrative (Cortazzi, 1993). This thesis document follows the narrative structure of the evaluation model and each element constitutes a chapter in the document. As Cortazzi (2001) notes in relation to ethnography:

Readers of ethnographic reports and those who write up such research need to be aware, at a metanarrative level, of how ethnography is often constructed as a narrative account of a quest, discovery and interpretation - the journey from outsider to insider - using story conventions to persuade readers effectively. (p. 387)

This document is a *performance* narrative (Wolfsen, cited in Cortazzi, 1993) in that it is a story I have rehearsed and am telling in the way I want and in my own time. Just as participants' narratives are a "version or view of what happened" (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 384), so this narrative represents my version of what happened during the inquiry process and my version of the outcomes. Cortazzi (2001) notes the telling of stories is a complex business. A narrative is about past event/s, but:

[it] rarely simply replays the chronology of the past as it occurred. Rather, in the interests of being newsworthy or tellable, events are selected, compressed, shaped, recreated and reconstructed for the occasion of the telling. (p. 389)

The abstract or overview to this story has appeared already. Chapter 1 is the orientation, and because this is a story about a research inquiry process, this chapter orientates the reader to some of the contextual events, theories and ideas which were background to the study. The complicating action for me as the researcher was undertaking the fieldwork for the study and so in Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings to the methodology and tell the story about interviewing participants and analysing documents and texts. In Chapter 3, I discuss the results of my interpretations of the various texts (interview transcripts and documents) I collected for the study. The evaluation component of the narrative, the reason for the telling, comes towards the end of the story, in Chapter 4. The coda to this story, Chapter 5, extracts me from the telling and brings me back to the present, although for me as the teller, the story really has not finished and probably never will.³ As noted in the abstract, interleaved between chapters are *portrayals* of some of the research participants' experiences of domestic violence. They illustrate and illuminate the depth and complexity of the stories of responding to domestic violence. Poetic representations and changes in font and style are used occasionally throughout the text to illustrate changes in voice. For example, italics are used to identify the voices of the research participants, quotes from brochures and also to show emphasis.

And finally, to the harridan's chorus which appears as boxed text on the page, signalled by the letter H in bold superscript.⁴ The chorus is made up of my resistant reflections on the text and interrupts intermittently, more frequent where my voice is strong and dropping away where I try and make room for the participants' voices. Singer (1992) notes that "part of the tradition of critical writing that postmodernism and feminism inherit, albeit in ways that are differentially specified, is a tradition of writing as a form

³ Labov and Waletzky (cited in Cortazzi, 1993) allowed that some narratives just keep repeating, moving from the resolution or evaluation straight into another complicating action and so on and so on.

⁴ Definition of a harridan: 'A woman regarded as scolding and vicious' (Lexico Publishing Group., 2000).

of resistance, writing which works not to confirm cohesion, but rather to disrupt, destabilize, denaturalize” (p. 469). The harridan’s chorus seeks to create a space for resistance to the thesis document itself which, at times, has risked becoming too academic, bland and pious. The chorus tries to work beyond the thesis document to express some of the ‘outrage and irony’ which Singer (1992) has suggested may be useful ‘tonal frame[s] for discourses of resistance’ (p. 470).

Domestic violence is a serious subject. The abuse, torture and murder of women and children by their partners and ex-partners is outrageous and activists are right to be outraged, particularly when some women and many men challenge the evidence of women’s abuse (regardless of how scientific it is) and suggest that men suffer *equally* badly at the hands of women through bad behaviour, harsh words or contested property settlements.^H However, as activists have seen over the past three decades, outrage (even well organised outrage) is not enough and it is not sustaining. There is a place for irony in the strategies of resistance and where I have felt it impossible to position the outrage and irony in the thesis text, I have used the space created by the harridan’s chorus.

Okay, I accept, this trivialises some men’s experiences of the abuse they suffer at the hands of women. I acknowledge that some women may be physically and emotionally violent and that their partners stay for some of the same reasons that women stay in violent relationships with men. However, we can go no further with this discussion until men begin to do the work that women have done, researching the extent and meaning of the violence in their lives and proposing solutions.

The harridan’s chorus has been positioned deliberately on the edge of the text, using a spidery font, boxed and sideways to represent the position of the harridan’s voice as marginal, uncertain but strident. Here, I have been inspired by postmodern social theorists who have been mindful of how textual representation can make explicit the polyvocal nature of their texts (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2004; Lather, 1997). Barbara’s narrative is the first to interleave with the thesis chapters and portrays her experience of living with, and leaving, a violent partner.

Barbara's narrative

I was 20 when I married my first husband. I went out with that guy for three years and he was a perfect gentleman and on our wedding night I was still a virgin and he raped me. And then two nights later he beat me up. He was insanely jealous, which I didn't know at the time – you know they hide it so well. I told my Mum the second time it happened and I said I'm giving him one more chance - when you get married it's forever and you and Dad have paid a lot of money for the wedding. He did it the third time and I left. He's since been killed in an accident so I don't have to worry about him anymore.

I've always been really defiant and stubborn. One of the reasons I got married was because his mother said you will never marry my son, and I said well you just watch me. So we get ourselves into a lot of trouble. Sad fact of life. That's no excuse, but you do pay sometimes for your own stubbornness. I felt really bad that my Mum and Dad had paid for this wedding and it had only lasted eight months. But my Dad said, that's fine. If you've learnt by your mistakes, I don't care how much it costs but if you don't learn by your mistake you'll continue to make the same mistake all your life. And unfortunately I did. I met up with this guy who I'd known on and off for years. We lived together and things were fine although I'd seen him sort of lose it a couple of times when he'd been drinking spirits but I had no idea how violent he could be. The first time he hit me my son was about six months old. I was holding him and he hit me and I was just absolutely shattered. I burst into tears and thought maybe it was just a one-off thing, maybe I was nagging him too much, maybe it was my fault. Then I had two other children in fairly quick succession and basically he had me right where he wanted me.

I always stayed home with the kids. I wouldn't see him for days, a week at a time. And if you ever said anything, you'd get beaten up. Punched. Kicked. It was always the same thing. After they have done that, they will cry and tell you how much they love you and then you have to go and perform in bed. But the next day, I'd say do you remember what you did last night? No, no. Or, maybe you deserved it.

I look back and wonder why I allowed myself to be put in that situation. I had a lot of confidence as a kid. Literally what they class as balls. I can go into any situation. I mean my parents were wonderful. My Dad was an alcoholic but he worked very hard and I couldn't comprehend that these guys I was with – they were also alcoholics but they turned violent. So I kept thinking it must've been me because, you know, I had the mouth.

I suppose I just kept making allowances for him. Nobody ever knew how bad he was. And even if they had've known, I really thought I was on my own. One day he had me out on the front verandah with a golf stick across my neck, and he'd already hit me. Punched me in the ear and I'd got a ruptured ear out of that. My next-door neighbours came out and I know she used to get beaten up as well because I'd called the police a few times for her. And, I'm going just ring the police, ring the police. And the husband thought it was really funny. And he said you're not going to kill her are you Tom? And he said, no. I'm just going to rough her up a bit and he goes oh well that's all right, as long as you're not going to kill her. And he and his wife walked back inside.

So, while the kids were young it was just full-on beatings all the time. And he was getting really paranoid. He had to own me. I suppose you'd call him a control freak these days. I was always such an outgoing person, I could talk to anyone. And you'd go out with all his friends, or they'd be around home and you'd laugh and talk about something and then the minute they'd go you'd be accused of flirting and they would bring up things like, sit down I want to talk to you about something that you said two years ago. And they would repeat some conversation and it wouldn't occur to you what they were talking about. And you'd get beaten up for that because you were taking the piss out of them.

We were moving down south and the night before we left he just went absolutely psycho. The kids and I went up two neighbours up and hid in their garage. She came outside and I told her what was happening so she took the kids inside and hid them. He came up to her place and said have you seen Barbara and she said no and then about two o'clock in the morning I said I have to go back because he should be asleep by now. She came with me like my kids were asleep in her place, and he had destroyed this house. There were knives stuck in the wall. He'd ripped cupboard doors open and he'd pulled everything out. Unpacking was all over the place. She couldn't believe it. She said if you had've stayed he would've killed you. Like they just get into a frenzy. So, you know, she saw that. But we never sat down and spoke about it.

He told me, if ever I left him - after I left him that one time and he came back - and he said if ever you leave me, I will hunt you down, I will take the kids out of school and I will kill them. So I mean, what sort of incentive do you need to stay there? And then I thought okay this is really your problem. I'd sort of had grown up very fast by then, I was no longer out there to have a good time. My kids were always, from the day they were born, they were my priority. You have to look after your own kids. I had to protect my kids. You look at it now, and like it is so out in the open now and whether it is just some little sixth sense that says this guy could be serious. I mean, I don't know. I look at him now and I think how could I have been so scared of you for so long? But when they are so fuelled up on alcohol, dope and drink and their strength. Like he is quite a big guy, solid.

We moved around a bit. Five years in one town, and then we moved to another town for Tom's job. One year we'd just moved. My eldest one was going into Grade 7 and the night before they started school he walked in the house, he'd been drinking and he started. ... We took off so the night before they started at their new school, we slept in the cemetery and then we came from the cemetery and they slept at the school and we could hear him driving around in the car through the streets and that. I went home about two o'clock in the morning and he had passed out. So then I took the kids home. We got up the next morning and he wouldn't say anything.

*The kids and I always spoke about it. I was very close to my kids. I remember when my eldest son was in high school—my kids were really good, studied heavily, all hours of the night studying. And I remember this night like my ex came home and was just - the place was just absolute bedlam and my son got up and he said 'Why don't you just **fuck off** and just leave us alone?' And he just stood there and said to his son 'Why don't you get fucked?' But I mean the kids and I had spoken about this and I had said look you know this is not normal behaviour. But I never told the kids that he was going to kill them. I said it's not normal behaviour but I said you know one day we will be out of this but we just have to bide our time. And I thought as the kids got older you know, my independence was coming back and I was back answering, standing up for my rights. He didn't want me to work because I was back working full time, playing sport and he didn't like that. He couldn't cope with that.*

I think it all sort of came to a head when we found out my Mum had cancer. I used to act really happy like I had no worries in the world with Mum and Dad. They never knew. Then she died. I came home. And it was about two weeks after Mum died and I got beaten up. I was actually punched between the legs and he rolled over and passed out. And I sat there all night and when he woke up the next morning I was standing over him and I said if you ever, ever touch me again I will kill you and he never laid a hand on me again. I think because I'd sat there all night and I thought ... I'd faced my own mortality by the morning. I'd lost my Mum and I thought I am going to die one day and I don't have to put up with this crap any longer.

So we went on like that for four years because my Dad was still alive and then Dad died and about a week after Dad died, he came home and he said what do you think maybe, what do you want to do? It's not working. Because I basically hadn't spoken to him for four years. I suppose you want a separation. I said no you're not putting that shit on me. Always I have to make the decisions and I said then I pay for it later on because you never really wanted to do it. And he said okay, okay I understand. What about if we have a trial separation and I'll go to Perth? And I went yes. So, I had to go to Perth. I found him a flat. I paid for that and shifted him up there. And then he rang up about two weeks later and said could he come back and I said no we've made the break. And then I spoke to a friend of mine and told her what was going on and I said why do I feel so guilty? I said I feel like such a bitch.

In the end he had no ties to me. The kids were older. My eldest had an apprenticeship, my son was in Year 12 and my youngest was in Year 10. He had nothing. I suppose I felt the threat had gone. How are you going to round up these three teenagers? And you know, do this? I treated him to the fact that he was just a sad little man in the end. I suppose he did try to give up drinking but, if you've got a problem, obviously you know about it. But like he used to get up in the morning and laugh after he knew he'd been out with the booze and say who do I have to apologise to today? It was just a big joke to him.

My youngest, he just couldn't cope with it for a lot of years. He said I just hate him for what he's done. I feel he just fucked up our lives so much and I can't get past it. And at that stage I was sort of coping quite well. Him and I used to talk about it a lot and I said well you have to. You have to learn to let it go otherwise you can never move on in your life. This is what you read in books. This is how you deal with these things - you have to be forgiving and all this. So you have to understand your father had a problem and you know, he's just a weak man. Some of us have to be strong and he will never be a strong person. So now, my youngest son and his father have a reasonably good relationship and the stupid part about it is, I resent it. I don't know that you ever ever get over it. But you don't stay bitter. You can let it go to a point.

I didn't talk about it to anyone because I wouldn't let my Mum and Dad know I had made the same mistake. You didn't talk about it because people did have this concept of some women are into violence. You know, they like to get beaten up and have sort of kinky sex after. But it is the pure shame. For years I kept thinking Barbara if you would just shut your mouth. And I remember saying to my brother years down the track like, probably if I had've kept my mouth shut I probably wouldn't have got beaten up half as much as I did. But he said, then again, you shouldn't have to. And I said that's exactly right.

I would not hesitate like to go in if I heard domestic violence next door. I would ring the police and make sure I would stay there with her. And I would say to the police, get him out of the house. I have been in this situation, get him out. Do not let him out until he is sober and then I would say to her this is what I lived through. You know this can be different. We need to stress to women who have lived through it, once they're out of that relationship, don't hide it. And realise that women are strong enough. You have to push that women are a very strong race and we can live on our own and we can make decisions and we can bring up our families.

Chapter 1: An orientation to the research story

In this chapter, I introduce the study by locating it within its temporal, spatial, theoretical, cultural and sociopolitical contexts. In the first section, I provide some background to the time and place of the research undertaking, focusing in particular on the aims, the rationale for the study and the research questions which guided the process of inquiry. In the second section, with reference to Appendix A, I explore how critical social theory, postmodernism and feminist theorising have influenced this study. In the third section, I discuss the cultural context of the study by attaching meaning to the concepts of subjectivity, power/knowledge and discourse. In the fourth section (before the chapter coda), I explore the sociopolitical context of the research by looking at how the ideas already discussed have influenced my understanding of the term domestic violence, particularly in relation to a working definition and explanatory framework.

Background to the study

At the beginning of the 21st century, domestic violence (along with other forms of violence against women) continues to be recognised as a significant social problem in most societies, although the extent to which the problem is identified and acted upon by individuals, families, communities and governments varies a great deal. In Australia, research has concluded that domestic violence is widespread, generally under-reported and that the consequences for survivor/victims may be severe injury, mental illness,

suicide and/or homicide (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991; Hanmer, 1996).⁵

Edleson and Eisikovits (1996) have referred to an *international battered women's movement* and note how the significance of the issue was acknowledged formally at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, where government and non-government organisations reported on the diverse approaches being taken to address the problem. Prior to the conference, women activists had done extensive work with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Committee, chaired by Elizabeth Evatt, former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia. The work of this committee had resulted in the United Nations General Assembly issuing the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, in 1993 (Murray, 2002). This declaration sought to compel nation states to condemn violence against women and to work actively against customs and traditions which promote or tolerate it. As Murray (2002) notes, the declaration made it clear that domestic violence “was understood as a manifestation of gendered structural power inequalities” (p. 156).⁶ As a result of this kind of work at local and international levels, domestic violence, along with other forms of violence against women, is now recognised globally as a significant public health and human rights issue (Heise, 1996; Kozma & Dauer, 2001; J. Peters & Wolper, 1995).

Australian state/territory and federal governments have recognised domestic violence as a significant social problem since the 1970s when, in response to a renewed naming of

⁵ I interchange the terms victim/survivor and survivor/victim throughout this document to unsettle the binary which has entered into much of the popular discourse around domestic violence, in particular to unsettle the implied victim to survivor journey metaphor (L. Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1996). Survivor/victim allows for the idea that women who experience domestic violence may be surviving even while they are experiencing the violence and that they may continue to be victimised in the aftermath by the memories and material consequences of the abuse.

⁶ Murray (2002) further notes, that the declaration did not carry the full weight of a UN Convention. It was without signatories and so was not enforceable (p. 155). Of greater concern, however, is that while the nation-state-as-entity becomes increasingly fragile (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) and global corporations undermine national policy commitments to justice for women (N. Klein, 2001), the authority of the United Nations has been undermined by the unauthorised 2003 invasion of Iraq.

the problem by feminist activist/practitioners and academics, they researched the extent of violence in the home and began to establish women's refuges and other women's crisis services as a response. During the 1980s, most states and territories established some form of policy unit with specific responsibility for domestic violence (Murray, 2002; Nancarrow & Struthers, 1995). At a federal level, in 1990, the Labor government developed the Australian National Strategy on Violence Against Women which, according to Murray (2002), "took a radical feminist approach, suggesting that those working in women's refuges and sexual assault services had had a significant impact on the ways in which violence against women was understood" (p. 154). The National Committee on Violence Against Women (NCVAW)⁷, which established the National Strategy, defined domestic violence at the time as:

behaviour adopted to control the victim which results in physical, sexual and or psychological damage, forced social isolation or economic deprivation or behaviour which causes women to live in fear. (NCVAW, cited in Murray, 2002, p. 154)⁸

Domestic violence remained on the Federal Government's policy agenda with the change to a conservative Liberal-National Party coalition government in 1996. The Coalition initially established the National Domestic Violence Forum (Weeks, 2000) and later, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV), a research and project development program which received \$50 million from 1997- 2003 (Murray, 2002). Summers (2003) praises the early work of the PADV (in particular the establishment of the National Domestic Violence Clearinghouse), but notes that in later years, the PADV funds were underspent and there was a shift away from the Federal Government's commitment to any substantial action on the issue of domestic violence.

⁷ The NCVAW was formed under the auspice of the Office of the Status of Women (OSW), Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). In October 2004, Prime Minister John Howard announced his intention to move the OSW from the DPMC to the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. This has been viewed generally as a downgrading of women's interests by the Federal Government.

⁸ This definition has gone on to become an important part of the professional practice discourse around domestic violence in contemporary Australia, adopted by various government and non-government agencies, including the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department (National Crime Prevention, 1999).

Exact incidence and prevalence rates of domestic violence are almost impossible to determine due to variations in definition and research design, poor levels of reporting and the difficulties associated with recording sensitive, confidential information.⁹ Despite these difficulties, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has had some success in determining likely rates of domestic violence. For example, in 1996, the *ABS Women's Safety Survey* found that 8% of women who were living in a marriage-type relationship reported an incident of violence occurring some time during the current relationship. Forty-two per cent of women who had left a marriage-type relationship reported an incident of violence by a former partner (ABS, cited in Keys Young, 2000, p. 8). With few exceptions, studies of the rates of domestic violence (that is violence between intimate and former intimate partners) conclude that women are most likely to be the victims of abuse and men the perpetrators (Bagshaw & Chung, 2000; Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur, & Harding, 1996; Putt & Higgins, 1997).¹⁰

The extent to which domestic violence is predominantly a form of violence perpetrated by men against women is particularly evidenced through studies on domestic homicide. Taking the view that wife killing is an extreme form of domestic violence, the figures on domestic homicide in Western Australia, show overwhelmingly that women are the main victims and men the main perpetrators. Between 1992 and 1994, there were 187 homicides in Western Australia. While the majority of homicide victims were men, less than 6% (6/105) of male homicides arose from spousal disputes. In contrast, exactly half (41/82) of all female homicides arose from domestic violence (Ferrante et al., 1996, p. 28). Similarly, Mouzos (1999, p. 11) found that between 1989 and 1998 Australia-wide, approximately 11% of male homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner

⁹ In relation to domestic violence, prevalence rates refer to the number of people in a particular population who have experienced what is considered to be domestic violence. Incidence rates refer to the number of people in a given year who have experienced domestic violence (Brownridge & Halli, 1999; Hacking, 1999).

¹⁰ Exceptions to these findings, such as those by McNeely and Robinson-Simpson (1987) tend to provoke controversy. This is particularly the case when studies have relied on the Conflict Tactics Scale, a measure of domestic violence which has been strongly critiqued (A. Browne, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Kurz, 1993; Saunders, 1986).

while the figure for women was 60%. A similar situation exists in the United States where Carden (1994) has noted that:

a woman is more likely to be physically assaulted, raped, or murdered by a current or former male partner than by any other assailant. ... Just over 50% of all female murders (compared to 12% of all male murders) are spouse perpetrated. (p. 544)

Aims of the study

The original aim of this study was to develop some ways of thinking about domestic violence that could lead to useful action by *lay people* responding informally when they witness or become aware of domestic violence. A person may witness or become aware of domestic violence as a friend, family member, neighbour, bystander or work/student colleague. People respond *informally* when they take action independently of any formal (state, market or voluntary/non-government) agency. They simply may *react* when they become aware of violence in a relationship and/or they may be proactive and undertake some kind of specific intervention, either to control the situation or to provide or facilitate care and assistance to the people involved. While codes of professional conduct usually encourage human service workers to maintain boundaries between their personal and professional activities, it is not always so straightforward. Some workers intentionally or unintentionally may blur their role and allow formal activities to blur into the informal, such as when they socialise with clients and/or provide informal support or assistance to people in need. Other service workers (such as bar staff or hairdressers) may find that as part of their formal role, they also provide a social service (such as active listening or emotional support) which is over and above what they formally are required (and paid) to do. This additional attention to customers' needs may be even sanctioned by the employer (Mehr, 1992; Sanchez, 2001).

In framing the proposal for this study, I wanted to redirect my gaze from victim/survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence to ourselves as everyday members of the community. I also wanted to steer away from a focus on formal

responding, particularly by the police and other human service workers. This area has been, and continues to be, well researched with studies by Nichols (1976); Borkowski, Murch and Walker (1983); Maynard (1985); Maguire (1988); Easta and Easta (1992); Sullivan (1997) and O'Donnell (2003) as examples. However, I found there is no neat border which separates the actions of victim/survivors, perpetrators of domestic violence, formal human service workers and informal helpers. For example, when a man threatens or assaults his partner, they both respond to the violence *as it happens*. Neighbours may call out to make it known they hear, physically intervene or contact police. The police may contact a women's refuge. How these actors, within their particular domains of response/ability, respond and interact with one another will be significant. Inevitably, when I spoke to people about responding to domestic violence, they were going to tell me about all kinds of inter/actions and I was going to need to make sense of them.

In my original plan for the study, I intended to speak to victim/survivors and/or perpetrators of domestic violence to hear about what they thought would be useful (or potentially useful) responses to the violence they experienced. I thought I would then go back to the community to consult with a broad cross-section to hear what they understood might be barriers and facilitators to enacting these responses. Of course before my ethnographic foray had gone very far, I realised that our experiencing, understanding and responding to domestic violence happens *in the context* of the barriers and facilitators to helping and that any of us might be (simultaneously, within the same body) both a witness to and/or victim/perpetrator of domestic violence. I soon realised that in any one participant's report or narrative, there were elements of how they simultaneously had experienced, understood and responded to the violence and to other people involved. Thus, as it turned out, there was no *redirecting of the gaze* or *going back to the community* in any linear fashion, but rather a more chaotic process whereby my gaze was drawn constantly to multi-faceted people and processes.

Once I realised that there was no clear separation between survivor/victims, perpetrators and witness/practitioners (formal and informal), my interest turned to the discourses which govern how we *are allowed to* respond to domestic violence from those various

domains. I began to interrogate dominant discourses about responding to domestic violence from a perspective informed by my reading of academic and practice texts and by the narrated experiences of the study participants. Notwithstanding my shifting gaze, throughout the life of the research, the aim of the study remained an exploration of the possibilities for useful informal responding where there is domestic violence.

Research questions

The research questions which eventually came to guide this study were:

- How do some people who experience or have experienced domestic violence (as lay witnesses, victim/survivors and/or perpetrators) describe and make sense of the violence and the role of informal responding? When the meanings around responding to domestic violence are at least partially co-constructed with the researcher (drawing on narratives and descriptions of experiences), what do these meanings look like?
- How are formal state-sponsored responses to domestic violence represented through key texts? What are the dominant discourses which inform formal state-sponsored responses to domestic violence and what discourses appear subjugated?
- In what ways do the dominant discourses about responding to domestic violence connect, resonate or clash with the meanings attached to the experiences by victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses to the violence? How does this look through a postmodern feminist lens and what might be some alternative practices which people could engage in if they wanted to respond helpfully where there is domestic violence?

Rationale for the study

At a personal level, the rationale for this study came from my awareness that the informal sector is involved in responding to domestic violence but that as a social work researcher/practitioner and a family/community member, I knew little about how it worked. On a few occasions, I had become aware of domestic violence within and through my own network of family, friends and neighbours. I had attempted to stand alongside women who were living with abuse to offer support and sometimes (though rarely and always with trepidation), I had challenged the perpetrator about what I thought he was doing. I had a strong sense that these interventions generally were unsatisfactory and not particularly well informed. At best, I could hope that I was not doing any harm but I was never particularly confident that I was doing any good.

Domestic violence research in Australia and overseas has focused primarily on incidence and prevalence rates, aetiology and formal prevention and intervention strategies. Very little attention has been paid to the ways in which informal helping systems operate in people's lives to afford them protection, support and healing, although a number of studies have shown that: a significant percentage of people know someone living in a violent relationship; most victim/survivors of domestic violence disclose first to family and friends, and informal helping is an important source of support (Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn, & Wadham, 2000; Cultureshift, 2000b; Goff, 2001; Patton, 2003). However, to date, very few government resources have been provided to support informal attempts to assist or intervene.¹¹

As noted above, studies show a significant number of people report knowing someone living in a violent relationship. One of the first studies in Australia to look at attitudes

¹¹ This may change over the next few years as Western governments continue to implement policies which reflect a neo-conservative New Right ideology and support capacity building programs by which *the community* is expected to take on an increased role in social support (*Close to Home*, 2003; Everingham, 1999). For example, the Federal and West Australian Governments are currently supporting research into the workplace as a site for responding to domestic violence (L. Gibbons, personal communication, December 6, 2004).

towards domestic violence found that almost half of the survey population reported knowing either a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence (Public Policy Research Centre, 1988). In the United States, Klein, Campbell, Soler and Ghez (1997) found that 34% of respondents in their study had witnessed a man beating his wife or girlfriend and a similar percentage reported knowing a woman who had been physically abused (p. 25). Similarly, Paquin (1994) concluded from his study that one in 10 respondents suspected domestic violence was occurring next door. When I began talking about my study topic with friends or associates, I found several of them spontaneously told me a story about witnessing or becoming aware of domestic violence in their family or neighbourhood.

A number of studies have found that victim/survivors of domestic violence seek out support and help from informal sources. In Australia, the Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce (1991) cited a study which found that 33% of respondents first disclosed the violence to a family member, friend or neighbour. Similarly, Holder (1998) has reported from her analysis of various studies that overwhelmingly, women “turn FIRST to friends, family and neighbours” (p. 5). The ABS *Women’s Safety Survey* found that 79% of women who had been a victim of physical assault had, at some time, discussed their experiences with a member of their informal network (ABS, cited in Patton, 2003, p. 81). Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn, & Wadham (1999) found after an extensive study that “informal networks were often women’s first source of help for domestic violence and their responses were often critical in determining future courses of action” (p. 6). This finding led the authors to recommend that:

priority be given to community education and development of activities that target family, friends and work colleagues in order to raise awareness of the needs of victims of domestic violence and appropriate responses to these needs. (Bagshaw et al., 1999, p. 19)

Finally, and most recently in Australia, Patton (2003) found in her study with women who had left violent relationships, that 77% of respondents “identified a family member as supportive or helpful at some point in [the process of] ... leaving and establishing a new life” (p. 81). For 34% of Patton’s respondents, informal sources of support

(friends, family, student/work colleagues, church congregation or a new partner) were a *key pathway* in the process of leaving a violent relationship (p. xvii). Thus, a research focus on the response/ability of the informal or lay helping systems towards the problem of domestic violence has seemed appropriate and timely.

Most of the research on domestic violence policy and practice in Australia and other [over]developed Western countries focuses on formal agency-based prevention and intervention strategies, their implementation and evaluation. These strategies primarily are implemented through agencies which are directly or indirectly sponsored by the state. For example, government instrumentalities such as state welfare departments, justice departments and the police are sponsored and controlled directly by the state. Non-government organisations such as refuges and specialist domestic violence counselling services are primarily funded and indirectly controlled by the state through the tendering and contracting process (Jamrozik, 2001). However, some formal responses to domestic violence are implemented through processes which are not controlled by the state. For example, the private for-profit sector provides medical services (through private practitioners), short-term accommodation at motels and caravan parks and information booklets and websites (for example, CWASU, 2005) sponsored by private companies such as The Body Shop (Roddick, 2001). Finally, some formal programs and services operate through non-government organisations which are funded exclusively by church-based or charitable institutions although these kinds of services, which receive no government support of any kind, are uncommon in Australia.

The rationale for this study emerged from a view that many of the contemporary formal responses to domestic violence in Western countries, including Australia, now may have some recognised limitations and there may be a need to explore alternative and/or additional kinds of responses. These limitations are discussed here in the context of the political economy of responding to human need. Firstly, as noted earlier, domestic violence is widespread. According to the *Women's Safety Survey* (ABS, cited in Bagshaw & Chung, 2000) in any year 7% of women may experience physical and/or sexual violence, most likely in the home. If we want to reduce the incidence and impact

of domestic violence in our communities, programs and services need to find ways to stop men acting violently; assist women to avoid violent relationships; maximise the safety of women living in violent relationships; provide support to women who leave violent relationships; and heal those people who have been or continue to be affected by violence. Formal state-sponsored responses to victim/survivors of domestic violence (such as financial assistance, refuges, court support and counselling) tend to be heavily utilised. Wilcox (2000) refers to the work of Bell and Forman in MacLeod (1987) and L. Kelly (1996) to support her view that governments should provide resources and support to enhance informal helping. She argues that “since domestic violence is not a minority problem, providing sufficient specialist services to cope with actual and potential demand is impractical” (2000, p. 35). Schechter (1996) has argued that on the basis of extrapolated national survey data in the United States, 42,000 women in Massachusetts would have experienced severe abuse in 1992. However, fewer than half this number received any kind of formal service (court support, shelter or support group). Given that all the formal services were utilised heavily, Schechter’s view was that demand for services always and significantly will outstrip supply. Ife (2000) makes a similar point in relation to the provision of general human services in the future:

It must be acknowledged that the common model of individualised expert professional services for the meeting of human need is simply unaffordable for all but a small minority of the population, and while it may be necessary to retain such programs in specific cases (e.g. cases of post-traumatic stress), they would be the exception rather than the norm. (p. 144)

The second problem with an over-reliance on formal, state-sponsored responses to domestic violence is that many prevention and intervention strategies (such as emergency accommodation, helplines and counselling services) operate from within the context of the broadly defined welfare state which now is being substantially reconfigured, some would say dismantled, by conservative and neo-liberal economic *reforms* (Ife, 1997; Jamrozik, 2001; Leonard, 1997; Rose, 1996). According to Yeatman (1998), a feature of late capitalism in most Western countries is the “concerted effort to disestablish the Keynesian welfare state policy agenda” (p. 7). This move towards a minimalist state in many Western countries may threaten the long-term viability of some formal programs and services responding to domestic violence. If and

when the state abrogates its important social-care responsibilities in the area of social welfare in general and domestic violence in particular, it will be important that alternative structures and mechanisms to turn around domestic violence and mitigate against its effects have been explored.

Finally, as Ife (1995, 1997) has noted, it is not only members of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative Right who have expressed dissatisfaction with state-sponsored welfare and personal support services provided in the context of the welfare state in Australia.¹² The neo-Marxist political economy view of welfare critiques the welfare state along with capitalism; from this perspective, there are inherent contradictions within capitalism which require the state to privilege the accumulation of capital by the few while it legitimates and harmonises the negative effect of capital accumulation on the many (Ife, 1995; O'Brien & Penna, 1998). Thus, according to Ife (1995), state-sponsored welfare has come under criticism from its traditional supporters:

It has become clear that the modern welfare state in Western societies has not been able to deliver all that it promised in the optimistic days of post-war consensus. The welfare state was justified by a social democratic/Fabian ideology that seems to have little legitimacy in the 1990s, and in retrospect, the ideals of the founders of the welfare state now seem hopelessly naïve. (p. 3)

As well as this critique from the hard Left of the political spectrum, another one comes from those theorising from the softer green, ecofeminist and postmodern perspectives (Ife, 1995; Lane, 1997; Warren, 1994). From these perspectives, the apparatus of the state shapes and reflects the powerful dominant discourses of white supremacy, patriarchy, militarism and rampant capitalism. This Alternative Theory critique (Shannon & Young, 2004) suggests that contemporary responses to social problems are formed by and through the technical rational discourses of the modernist state. From this perspective, the powerful, narrow and reductionist discourses of social work,

¹² The idea that the current provision of health, education and social support in Australia still constitutes a *welfare state* now is contested. Jamrozik (2001), for example, refers to a *post-welfare state* in Australia.

medicine and law for example (C. Fisher, 2000; K. Healy, 2000), not only have failed to deal with the complexity of people's experiences with problems such as domestic violence, but also have extended the state's control and surveillance of vulnerable populations (Donzelot, 1979; C. Fisher, 2000; K. Healy, 2000). Further, green and ecofeminist perspectives recognise the welfare state as unsustainable in the long term, because of the inherent ecological unsustainability of the growth-based economies needed to maintain it (M. Hoff & Polak, 1993; Ife, 2001a; Mies & Shiva, 1993).

Thus, while many *business-as-usual* responses to domestic violence are valued and useful, various theories suggest that conventional health, legal and welfare responses to the problem may be vulnerable and unsustainable in countries where social policy is formulated by governments with a strong anti-collectivist welfare ideology.

Non-foundational theorising

I do not regard any of the theoretical approaches which I take up as a totality that must be accepted or rejected in its entirety. Each provides useful tools for the analyses and arguments I wish to make. (I. Young, 1990, p. 8)

The metatheories of critical social science and postmodernism/poststructuralism have informed this inquiry process. In Appendix A, I explore how I came to understand these metatheories and how they became a point of departure for me to consider postmodern feminist theorising as scaffolding to support ideas about responding to domestic violence. I have not considered any of these theories (and my positioning within them) as representing some kind of definitive truth about how I see the world; rather I view them in line with I. Young's (1990) notion above; that is, as tools to guide my thinking.

In the rest of the chapter, I draw on the ideas of social theorists as well as social workers, educators and nurses (many of them women) to explore the implications of postmodern feminist theorising and practice, particularly in the area of social work. I hope to show here why the inquiry process, and the story I am telling about it, has taken the focus, shape and direction that it has.^H

As much as I wanted to tiptoe around and stay tentative about my positioning within the broader theoretical traditions, I eventually realised that I'd better declare myself a feminist. Like Ross (2002), I was late coming to the view that I needed to do this. My reading and writing were well under way when it dawned on me that not everyone *IS* a feminist; that feminist ideas cannot simply be imputed into all the writings emanating from critical social science and postmodernism/poststructuralism just because I think and feel as a feminist and assume that every other person does as well. Moving my explorations into critical theory and postmodernism/poststructuralism into an appendix felt good. Decentring the likes of Kincheloe and McLaren and Foucault wasn't going to do them any harm.

Postmodern feminist theory and practice

I feel like saying I am the one, the true, the only feminist, and all others are deviations from me, and you can say the same for yourself. There are, after all, no membership cards issued, no central office issuing general policy directives. We can do as we like. (Weldon, 1984, p. 354)

As Weldon (1984) suggested, there is no single, unified feminist theory although most feminists are keen to see social, legal and political reforms come about to reduce the extent to which women overall experience disadvantage relative to men (Morgan, 1984; Waring, 1988). According to Summers (2003), in Australia, the Prime Minister John Howard has suggested that “the feminist battle has been won”; that is, that the women’s movement has succeeded in achieving the aims of feminism and Australia has entered a period of postfeminism where the challenge for women is to accept and embrace the opportunities of new-found freedoms (p. 21). The Prime Minister’s comments reflect the depiction in popular culture of modern Western women *having it all* including access to contraception, child care, equal pay and rewarding careers. However, as

Pritchard Hughes (1994) suggests, this view continues to be contrary to the lived experience of most women:

This experience is of a world in which sexual violence against women and children is increasing, where women are exhorted to pay more and more attention to their adherence to an image which requires constant work, where motherhood is being increasingly promoted as approaching a religious experience, and where women, if they live with a man, can expect to shoulder almost all the domestic work as well as their paid work. (p.2)

Feminist theories all take as their starting point the idea of an (almost) universal experience of woman as *the other* in historical and contemporary societies (de Beauvoir, 1989). In the West, the second wave of feminism in the 1960s built on the work of earlier feminists and some of the critiques of capitalism which were central to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. For example, socialist feminists explored the way in which patriarchy acts in concert with capitalism, to determine as natural, the relationship between people with different levels of economic power and privilege (Pettman, 1992). Radical feminism extended this basic idea and interrogated institutions (such as the church, military, government, the law and medicine), literary texts, social policies and the nature of social science itself, in order to expose the extent to which male and female roles, relationships and ways of knowing are determined by patriarchal structures and processes acting against the interests of women (Modleski, 1991). Ecofeminists such as Mies and Shiva (1993), Hallen (1994) and Warren (1994), have explored how the woman-nature connection has been used to reinforce the patriarchal domination of women and all non-human species. Like postmodern feminist theorists (Benhabib, 1992; Flax, 1990; Lather, 2001), some black womanist theorists (hooks, 2000b; Huggins, 1998; Hudson-Weems, cited in Taylor, 1998b) have unsettled more traditional feminist theory, challenging its claims of universalism in relation to women's experiences of oppression, particularly the negative portrayal of the church and the family by white Western feminists.

The purpose of this section is to bring me to a point where I can explain how and why postmodern, feminist theorising and practice (B. Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook, & Rossiter, 2000; Pease, 1999) resonated for me as a guiding set of ideas for this particular

inquiry. A postmodern feminism is neither a synthesis nor a hybrid of feminism and postmodernism, but the possibility of some transient theoretical space *beyond* both. Thus, it is both feminist and postmodern and it is neither. It is a refusal, a resistance, to privileging one over the other or allowing one to dominate by being *more right*. According to Singer (1992), postmodern feminism reflects a kinship relationship rather than a marriage of ideas.¹³

As noted in Appendix A, some social workers share the concern of feminists that PM/PS¹⁴ theories demand a critique of their emancipatory efforts (Wood, 1997). It is the inherent (even celebrated) relativism and uncertainty of postmodernism which has made some social work academics nervous:

A very important consequence of these [relativist] views is that there is no way to decide between rival theories, and attempts to develop grand or universal theories are pointless. (Peile & McCouat, 1997, p. 348)

Like the feminist critics of postmodernism, these practitioners are concerned about the loss of an objective truth to guide the choice of the *right* theory to guide the *right* practice (Solas, 2002). They appear to want to hold onto the notion that the choice of practice theories (right from wrong) is an ontologically determined choice rather than an ideologically determined one.

Making practice judgements because you believe you have *truth* on your side may be comforting, but the 'paradigm wars' (Guba, 1990; Lincoln, 1989) have forced social workers (along with everyone else) to question what it is that we can claim to know:

¹³ However, Singer (1992) has noted she prefers the metaphor of a corporate merger to the metaphor of kinship because it reflects a market pragmatism over the complicated intimacy of kinship and family.

¹⁴ Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) play ironically with postmodernism by turning its obsession with language back on itself, referring irreverently to postmodernism and poststructuralism as PM/PS and in this document, I have followed their lead. More recently, Alvesson (2002) uses the term 'pomo' to dismantle the modernism-postmodernism duality while maintaining the irony and self-parody (p. 13).

As individuals we must make judgments, and as members of social groups, however loosely organised, we must be witness to situations in which our individual judgments are played out with the judgments of other individuals. (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 887)

Thus, we can acknowledge that judgements, particularly in areas where social workers operate, are primarily made on the basis of ideology and discourses about what is right or wrong (okay or not okay) rather than claims to objective facts or truths. All that a relativist ontological positioning does is remove the power to justify a point of view as scientific, with claims to a higher knowing based on some objective truth, privileged standpoint or 'epistemic superiority' (N. Fraser, 1989, p. 181). N. Fraser explains the issue of relativism in the context of needs assessment:

To say that needs are culturally constructed and discursively interpreted is not to say that any need interpretation is as good as any other. On the contrary, it is to underline the importance of an account of interpretive justification. (p. 181)

This is particularly relevant in the context of responding to domestic violence. As Bagshaw et al. (2000) note, much of the tension and contestation between supporters of different theoretical interpretations of domestic violence, is based around the issue of competing needs. If we listen to men's voices and respond with services, what will those services look like? Will they recognise domestic violence in the context of women's oppression? Will men use these services and will money be diverted away from services for women?

According to Flax (1992), the PM/PS challenge to feminism and other radical critical theories (many of which, along with feminism, inform critical social work practice) has been the challenge to 'innocence' and 'innocent knowledge' which was the promise of modernist Enlightenment philosophy:

By innocent knowledge I mean the discovery of some sort of truth which can tell us how to act in the world in ways that benefit or are for the (at least ultimate) good of all. Those whose actions are grounded in or informed by such truth will also have *their* innocence guaranteed. They can only do good, not harm to others. They act as the servant of something higher and outside (or more than) themselves, their own desires and the effects of their particular histories or social locations. (p. 447)

Confronted by a loss of innocence, practitioners are compelled to state their case, to enunciate their position and reasons for action, ideally suspicious of their own reasoning and open to the reasoning of others. For social workers, this means being open to the reasoning and knowledge base of client groups. As Flax (1992) has concluded:

If the hankering for an absolute universal standard were absent, 'relativism' would lose its meaning and force. Instead we would have to pay more attention to the conditions under which conflicting claims can be resolved and those where only political actions, including the use of force, are sufficient. (p. 453)

If there is no objective truth to tell us how to act in the world or by which to evaluate our actions, then how is this to be determined? Does it mean that there can be no meaningful action and if this is the case, why bother with feminism or social work or any other emancipatory practice? One way through this, is to consider that the evaluation (of the decision or the practice) lies in the doing and reflection on that doing rather than *outside* in some objective assessment of the reason for doing it. This is not inconsistent with feminist (and even standpoint) theorising which always has claimed an inextricable link between theory and the doing of it. For example, Stanley and Wise (1993) have cited Chester's view that:

Radical feminist theory is that theory follows from practice and is impossible to develop in the absence of practice, because our theory is that practising our practice is our theory. (p. 56)

The idea of a postmodern feminist social work is relatively new and as noted earlier, not entirely welcome in the profession. This is despite the reassurances of social work academics like Pease and Fook (1999), who can articulate the value of PM/PS while they recognise that a "purely post-modern analysis does not necessarily provide guidelines – or even a moral basis – for responsible action" (p. 10). Similarly, Ife (1997) and Lane (1997) have not embraced PM/PS carelessly or uncritically. They explore the ways in which postmodernism usefully can sit alongside green political theory and feminism to inform a radical, ecofeminist social work practice. Postmodernism, to the limited extent that it influences social work, does not necessarily prescribe or preclude anything, other than, possibly, premature closure and dogma. A matriarch in Australian social work, Lane (1997) has described how her own theorising

and practice has been informed by a green, postmodern feminism. She has suggested that:

ecofeminism offers a synthesis of social and ecocentric purposes and values as a basis for tackling inequalities, whilst postmodern feminists enlighten our understanding of difference and encourage us to renounce certainty and last proofs. (p. 319)

In the context of orientating this inquiry process (and myself as a researcher), postmodern feminist theorising has unsettled some of my taken-for-granted assumptions about identity/subjectivity, power/knowledge and the role of language and discourse in meaning-making. Following Kendall and Wickham's (1999) interpretations of Foucault's work, I maintained a suspicious posture towards the taken-for-granted assumptions about domestic violence, in particular, the likely characteristics, behaviours and experiences of victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses. Aware of Foucault's notion of looking for contingencies rather than causes (Kendall & Wickham, 1999), I was alert to the competing theories of causation in relation to domestic violence and stayed suspicious of the way different groups might privilege certain causal stories in order to support familiar and taken-for-granted ideas about responding to domestic violence (Yllo, 1988).

In the next section, I explore the meanings I came to attach to some key concepts which were significant to the research aims. The notions of subject and subjectivity; power and power/knowledge; language and discourse became ideas for me which informed how I came to understanding *domestic violence* and the myriad of ways in which people respond to it, as an experience and an idea.

Meanings and understanding

Part of my interest in this study came from my awareness of the discrepancies in the way people make meaning around domestic violence. I had my own understandings and they often differed from the understandings of family and friends who witnessed or lived closely with violence as victim/survivors or perpetrators, and from formal service providers who intervened. These discrepancies became more pronounced when I began hearing the research participants' stories. For example, while my formal service provider colleagues worked with definitions, best practice manuals and policy documents, the people I knew and the people I was meeting through the study rarely spoke of, or showed any interest in these things.

According to Hacking (1999), the idea of something like domestic violence is a [social] construction.¹⁵ He distinguishes between *objects* (people, actions and behaviours) and the *meanings* people ascribe to these objects. It is the meanings which are ascribed to actions and other objects which constitute the development of a social construction, an idea that we might talk about, such as child abuse or domestic violence. It is because people often ascribe different meanings to the same objects that we notice differences in how people understand and make sense of their experiences.

When I began talking to the research participants, I was struck by *who they were* rather than what had happened to them; by a sense of them (and me) as embodied subjects occupying a place in the world regardless of the experiences we were talking about. None of the participants seemed to occupy a fixed identity position. They did not label themselves as victims, survivors, perpetrators or witnesses to domestic violence. I was the one who, at least initially, felt compelled to think about labels for them. Regardless

¹⁵ Hacking (1999) is critical of the use of the word 'social' in the term 'social constructionism'. He argues that all constructionism is social, so the social is redundant.

of my questions or prompts, they told me stories about domestic violence in which they were central characters. In these stories, their expressions about themselves, their identities often seemed to change within the same story and across time. For example, they might tell a story about experiencing violence from a partner *and* a story about perpetrating violence or tell me one story about perpetrating violence and then another one about how they had witnessed and responded to violence as a friend or a neighbour. With some of the participants, by the time I met them, their sense of *who they were now* seemed different from *who they had been then*, at the time when the events about which they were telling me had happened.

Much of what is written in the formal academic and practice literature about domestic violence (books, journal articles, policy documents and brochures) constructs fixed and singular identities for the people involved. There are victims or survivors or victim/survivors, perpetrators, and helping professionals such as doctors, police officers and social workers. Rarely is there any mention of other people who may be involved such as family members, friends, neighbours or bystanders. Rarely if ever, do identities overlap and so rarely do we consider that victim/survivors may be social workers, that perpetrators may be supporters of victims, or that children may be victim/survivors as well as witnesses and supporters. And yet, when I listened to the stories of the people who participated in this research, this was what I heard.

In this study, I found it was not possible or helpful to categorise the research participants on the basis of single identity categories and so I had to explore different ways of understanding the notion of the self/subject in society. Women who had lived with violence for example, may have been victim/survivors of domestic violence (even if they did not use the label) but that was not *all* they were or had become.¹⁶ At the

¹⁶ Chung (2001/2002) and C. Fisher (2000) note how feminist activists historically used the term victim as part of a strategy to politicise women's experience of criminal assault. Chung expresses her concern that the language of victim (and survivor) has the potential to totalise women's identities, in particular, ascribing them an identity which is tied almost exclusively to their experience of abuse.

same time as they were describing events which would identify them as victims of abuse, they also were describing themselves and events in ways which identified them as competent mothers, diligent workers, caring daughters, angry or indifferent sisters. Thus, I realised early on, as I was trying to make sense of what I was hearing from participants, that I was beginning to frame them as active subjects through relations of power/knowledge, language/discourse and the idea of domestic violence, rather than as individuals with fixed identities as victim, survivor, witness or perpetrator.

In the following sections, I explore notions of subjectivity, power/knowledge and discourse with a particular focus on how these ideas have influenced my understanding of the idea of domestic violence and the role of informal helping.

Subject [ivity]

In this section, I explore the ways in which notions of self/subject, identity and subjectivity have been understood and worked with in the study under the influence of post-modern feminist theorising. As Mansfield (2000) notes, the term subject (more so than self) “captures the sense of social and cultural entanglement” as the individual is located/locates him/herself in the world (p. 2). This inquiry process primarily is about the active engagement of people (via their minds and bodies) in relationship with one another because domestic violence (and any response to it) happens *between* people in the context of their relationship.^H At the same time, domestic violence happens in the context of an individual’s social and cultural environment (home, neighbourhood, nation state) and so Mansfield’s notion of subjectivity resonated for me with the aims of this study.

I am nervous about writing this because as feminists, we have (for good reason) been keen to background the personal relationship aspect of domestic violence in order to foreground the sociopolitical context in which it happens. Once again though, we have been forced to make choices (and not necessarily particularly good ones), because our theorising has been herded about by men. .

Writings about the idea of the subject/subjectivity (see, for example, Mansfield, 2000; Marshall, 1996; Pease, 2003) usually juxtapose in some way pre-modern or religiously inspired constructs of the self, the post-Enlightenment humanist subject, the psychoanalytic subject and the postmodern notion of the subject. It was the Enlightenment focus on the autonomous individual which resulted in the emergence of the humanist subject as unique, self-defining and self-creating (Taylor, cited in Davies, 1991; Rothfield, 1990). The humanist construct of the Enlightenment subject is familiar to social workers to the extent that social work (with its focus on human rights, justice and self-determination), has been considered as a predominantly humanist endeavour (Ife, 1997; Mullaly, 1997; Payne, cited in Pease, 2003). In exploring a range of theoretical underpinnings to social work, Rojek, Peacock and Collins (1988) defined humanism as “a longstanding influence within social work, resting on a philosophical premise that humans, as humans, share essential properties ... which include consciousness, reason, compassion, responsibility, and choice” (p. 114).

However, while this humanist version of the subject has come to dominate Western philosophy and science, other versions persist and challenge single, totalising ideas of what it is to be a person. For example, (Sauve, 1996) has suggested that Indigenous notions of the self make it difficult, if not impossible, for many Indigenous victim/survivors of violence to leave traditional lands or support the removal and distant incarceration of their partners. She has noted that “it would make sense that the Aboriginal individual might not experience self and other as absolutely separate; that self and kin/clan/community may be so intrinsically bound as to take on similar meaning” (Sauve, 1996, p. 10). Here she offers an alternative construction of the self to the one on which most social work practice is based.¹⁷

¹⁷ Sauve further argues that mediation may be appropriate in Indigenous communities where there has been violence if it can effect a settlement based on reconciliation: “reconciliation of inner conflict (source of illness), reconciliation with the ‘other’ (disputants), and reconciliation with the community (clans from all sides)” (1996, p. 10).

In social work as elsewhere, PM/PS theorising has begun to have a substantial influence on dominant understandings around the notion of the subject. According to B. Fawcett (2000), postmodernism tends to “view subjects as effects of discourse or as positions in language” (p. 65). In social work, this challenges some of the basic notions of the profession (such as the notion of personhood) and subsequently, it challenges some of social work’s sacred and universalising constructs, including some elements of the code of ethics and declarations on the inviolability of human rights (Hugman, 1998; Ife, 2001b). Further, PM/PS theorising can undermine the concept of human agency and the possibilities of working with identity politics, two things that activist social workers have been particularly successful at using around the issue of domestic violence. From the broad perspective/s of PM/PS, there is no unified self with an intact identity but rather shifting subjectivities, formed and re-formed, constituted and reconstituted, performed and re-performed in the context of human agency (in whatever form that takes), discourses, identities, inter-subjectivity and narrative (Davies, 1991; Goyder, 2001; Richardson, 2000; White, 1992a).

In this project, I have worked with the notion of a constituted subjectivity as well as with the commonsense notion of identity as label. Identity is taken to mean a form of externalised subjectivity, a label attached to the self (and occasionally removed) by the self or others. Viewed this way, the notion of identity has a transformative value and can be used as a political tool. We can form alliances and solidarities with others who adopt or are given the same label as us and a political identity is possible. Identity becomes a space for acting [out] from, for taking action, for revolution. Thus, if we identify as a victim of abuse, we will be able to develop some collective action as victims of abuse.¹⁸ However, PM/PS theorising suggests some caution. Where does useful solidarity end and unhelpful essentialism begin? By claiming a particular identity as a basis for political action (woman, disabled, lesbian), how do you prevent

¹⁸ However, this also can work the other way. Some men have discovered a political identity and now mobilise under the banner of victims of women’s oppression. A particularly vicious form of this has emerged in Australia. Known as the Blackshirts, members of this (mainly) male group use a range of strategies to harass women who try to separate from their husbands (de Krester, 2002).

this from becoming a totalising identity? It is all well and good to claim the identity of woman, but is that *all* we are? And how much control do we have over what others think it means to *be* a woman or disabled or lesbian?

K. Healy (2000) uses a Foucauldian analysis in her work with young women who have been victims of abuse to suggest that too much emphasis on their (self) identification as victims may not be in their long-term interests:

While in activist practices the use of identifications may be necessary, critical poststructural theory alerts us to the dangers of approaches deriving from this foundation. Collective identifications provide a conduit for the discipline and surveillance of marginal populations by confining them to ways of being, thinking and acting (see Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1992; Cixous, 1994a, 1994b). For example, the collective identity of the young women as victims and survivors of violence gave them a public voice but also constrained them to speak from that voice, whilst marginalizing other identifications that were relevant to them. Even if, as activists, we cannot forgo identity because of its political utility, we can be more cautious in invoking identifications and more self-reflexive about their effects upon those with whom we work for social transformation. (p. 120)

Similarly, Trinh (1992) has suggested there have been “repressed complexities of the politics of identity” (p. 140). However, she has not suggested that the critical/feminist baby of identity politics be thrown out with the PM/PS bathwater:

'Identity' has now become more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle. So although we understand the necessity of acknowledging this notion of identity in politicizing the personal, we also don't want to be limited to it. (p. 140)

Drawing on Weedon (1992) and others, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggest a way of understanding subjectivity from a PM/PS perspective which explains how a more contingent and cautionary process of identification comes about through “the various discursive fields from which language emanates and in which we find ourselves” (p. 164). They note further that:

the subject is not primarily a 'social construction', but a construction of the self reflecting on the self, albeit a construction that established forms of power/knowledge continually try to imprint with their crystallized patterns. The

outcome of this struggle between subject and power/knowledge is always uncertain, never decided in advance, and never final. (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 230)

Davies (1991) drew on D. Smith (1987) to make a similar point about the person as 'subjected by discourse' in the process of identity formation. For Davies, by moving through different discursive spaces, the person is able to construct and present multiple and, at times, contradictory identities to themselves and others. This process is invisible unless the subject herself can engage reflexively with the process of identity formation as it happens, and through this awareness, influence the process. Davies notes:

The speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, can use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other, both in terms of her own experienced subjectivity and in the way in which she chooses to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others. (1991, p. 46)

The idea of contingent and cautious identities resonated with me throughout the research process, through the stories participants told me about their experiences with violence. When I drafted the research proposal, I had to think about who I thought would be likely participants in the study. In my original proposal, I envisaged talking to *victims* and *perpetrators* to find out what they thought about informal helping. Then I planned to run focus groups with *informal helpers* to see how they responded to the experiences and ideas of the other (that is, victims and perpetrators). It was a helix shaped dialectic process I had in mind. Of course, this process never eventuated and the research design became much more complex and emergent, in part because the labels or identities I might have wanted to give participants, did not easily fit. As I got to know them, I recognised their multiple subjectivities; their multiple, often conflicting sense of who they were in relation to others.

Through the life of the research project, I also experienced and reflected on my own shifting and unstable subjectivities which are reflected in this primary narrative of the research process (Polkinghorne, 1997). As Richardson (2000) notes:

The ethnographic life is not separable from the Self. Who we are and what we can be - what we can study, how we can write about that which we study - is tied

to how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members. (p. 939)

Thus, I have tried to be reflective about how my identities (from without) and subjectivities (from within) have enabled me to negotiate my relationships with the research participants and professional colleagues, given that through this research endeavour, we all have been engaged in what Mansfield (2000) refers to as a ‘social and cultural entanglement’.

Power

The concept of power is significant to the framing of domestic violence research in Australia because power is considered central to the issue. For example, the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Pope, 1999; Shepard & Pence, 1999; Yllo, 1993), which was developed as an educational tool for the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, has almost become synonymous with the construct of domestic violence. The wheel, shown in this document as Appendix B, helps to explain the phenomenon of domestic violence by identifying and describing behaviours which women experience as coercive and frightening, such as the use of male privilege, emotional abuse and threats. The visual metaphor of the wheel illustrates how these behaviours (as spokes) create the environment where acts of physical and sexual violence (around the rim) can take place (Mederos, 1999).

The wheel also is illustrative of ‘violence as an instrumental power strategy’ which according to O’Neill (1998), is one of the five dominant discursive positions in relation to domestic violence (p. 464).¹⁹ According to O’Neill, instrumental violence is understood as violence “used primarily as a strategy to resolve conflicts, to remove

¹⁹ The other four discursive positions in his typology are: pathology, violence as an expression of inner tension, abuse as a consequence of the normative social system and violence as learned behaviour.’

stressors, to get one's way, to assert dominance over others, and/or to enhance one's self-esteem or self-concept" (p. 466). Used in this context, one aspect of instrumental power is the representation of desire on the part of the perpetrator to possess power (or control, dominion or authority) *over* his partner. This notion of *power over* is constructed usually as a zero sum game whereby to have power is to have it at the expense of another, so not to have power is to be diminished by the other, resulting in the loss of self-esteem or self-concept. Another construction of power is *power to* which refers to the ability or capacity to perform some task or achieve some goal. When we talk about power as *the power to have power over another person*, we employ both constructs together. It is this notion of power which is more in line with that used by Foucault (cited in Rabinow, 1984) and which led him to suggest that wherever such a situation exists (where someone has the power to have power over another), there is likely to be resistance. For Foucault:

aside from torture and execution, which preclude any resistance, no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. (p. 245)

Critical theorists identify structural power as power embedded in the various institutions, knowledges and discourses of the dominant groups in a society. Feminists understand patriarchal power in the context of structure for example, because it represents a system of pre-existing social relations whereby the needs, desires and perspectives of men take precedence over (and often dominate) the needs, desires and perspectives of women. According to Layder (1997):

the term 'structural power' refers to the resources (e.g. means of production, means of violence, monopoly of skills or information), that social groups (e.g. classes, or occupational groups), collectively possess, and which situates them in some pre-established, unequal social relation to other groups. (p. 105)

For this understanding, Layder (1997) draws on Lukes' three-dimensional view of power, which:

understands power as involving a situation in which A has power over B to the extent that he or she prevails over B not only through one-dimensional decision-making and two dimensional restriction of issues (meta-decision making), but also by preventing B from realizing what his or her 'real' interests are, or

preventing B from articulating them effectively, owing to the ‘mobilization of bias’ which results from the institutional structure of society. (p. 108)

Lukes’ third dimension of power effectively describes *hegemony*, a Gramscian term which describes the way individuals and groups appear to collude in their own oppression by adopting the ideology of their oppressors (Blackburn, 2000; Ife, 1997; Fanon, cited in Pease, 2003). This view of power, as control or dominion over others, has particular relevance to the issue of domestic violence where men exercise what is experienced as excessive and unreasonable control over their female partner. McHugh and Hewitt (2000) discuss the process of ‘mind control’ or ‘brainwashing’ to explain how women who experience domestic violence can come to see the world through the eyes of their abusive partner. Similarly, Graham, Rawlings and Rimini (1988) and Card (2002) refer to the Stockholm Syndrome to explain the way abused women can begin to identify with their abuser in the way hostages sometimes identify with hostage-takers as a survival strategy.

However, “power is both a negative and a positive force” (Aronowitz & Giroux, cited in Morrow, 1991, p. 55) and while postmodern ideas around power relations allow for a notion of structural power (as power over), they also suggest ways of thinking about power which differ considerably from the structuralists’ ideas. According to Foucault (cited in Rabinow, 1984), power is embodied and exercised in fields or sites of power (including the body itself) through relationships. Power *passes through* people and is not located within institutions or structures independently of people or relationships. It is the power embedded within active agents (subjects) and the way these subjects interact with systems of domination and oppression, which allows us to see the sites of resistance and opposition to abuses of power. Thus, from this perspective, power is more exercised than possessed; experienced rather than given or taken away (Marshall, 1996; McNay, 1994).

Power/knowledge

Foucault had a particular way of talking about power through his construct of the power/knowledge nexus. There is a tacit, commonsense knowing in our culture that 'knowledge is power' which simply means that to have knowledge about certain things increases our opportunities to exercise power in that arena. Foucault's way of thinking about the power/knowledge nexus was a reversal of this understanding; that is, to have power is to have [the power to produce what counts as] knowledge. Summarising this position, Smart (cited in Jupp & Norris, 1993) notes:

Power produces knowledge, they imply one another: a site where power is exercised is also a place at which knowledge is produced. (p. 49)

Rolfe (2000) refers to Gadamer and uses the 'two different but related meanings' of the word authority to explain how this link between power and knowledge might come about. According to Rolfe, Gadamer made the distinction "between being *authoritarian* (that is, being *in* authority) and being *authoritative* (that is, being *an* authority)" (p. 56). Being *in* authority is about the exercise of 'power over'; positioning oneself to make certain claims about truth or the right thing to do. Being *an* authority is about being recognised as having a particular ability or capacity, the 'power to' perform or speak with competence in a particular area of knowledge. Thus, authoritativeness is about *being given* the authority to be an authority and therefore able to make truth claims based on this recognition. However, in many institutions, disciplines or sites of power, these two concepts of authority are conflated so to be *in* authority, positions the subject to decide what it is for something to be true or the right thing to do. Once the same person (or groups or classes of people) have established what knowledge it is that counts in order to be considered authoritative (via their authoritarianism), it is a simple next step to become that *authority* in terms of the relevant knowledge for that institution, discipline or site of power:

Power produces knowledge ... power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, cited in McNay, 1994, p. 63)

Foucault's construct of power/knowledge involves us being made subjects in the context of particular bodies of knowledge, in a similar way to how we develop subjectivity in the context of discourse. From the perspective of Foucault's power/knowledge nexus, 'power over' is established and exercised simultaneously through the power to use language, authority and truth claims. In order to understand and resist authoritarian claims to truth and the right thing to do, it becomes important to resist what we might consider illegitimate claims to authority and to establish alternative sites of power (for example, a new academic discipline) based on alternative knowledge/s to what we might consider mainstream. It has been this process at work over the past 30 years in most Western countries which has seen a shift away from the power of psychiatry to speak with authority about the aetiology and treatment of domestic violence, towards a feminist authority. D. Smith (1990) has made the following point:

Until the women's movement opened up women's standpoint as a place to speak from, there seemed no point of entry that did not convert what was primary in people's experience to mere illustrations, subdued by the authorized voices of psychiatry and sociology. (p. 204)

However, since second-wave feminists have brought the issue of domestic violence back into the public realm, placing it under 'the sovereignty of discourse'²⁰, non-feminist (and some anti-feminist) discourses have developed around the definition, aetiology and methods of intervention where there is domestic violence. These discourses (many deemed *scientific*) have become powerful with their power exercised authoritatively and with authoritarianism by some professional discipline groups; for example, doctors, lawyers, psychologists, sociologists and social workers. People who respond informally to domestic violence (neighbours, friends, bystanders) are outside this power/knowledge nexus as they have not been created as subjects within a dominant discourse of domestic violence. As a consequence, little is known about them, what they think or what they do.

²⁰ Kendall and Wickham (1999, p. 39) have drawn on Foucault's (1989) *Birth of the Clinic* for this term.

In this study, I seek to challenge and unsettle some of the knowledge/truth claims in relation to domestic violence. When radical feminists were successful in having physical assault against an intimate partner recognised as a criminal offence (the *object* of which always had been a crime, while the *idea* of it had not), the authority to deal with domestic violence largely shifted from feminist activists to the police, even though the police never were authoritative about domestic violence in the same way as feminist activists were; that is, from having listened with regard to the voices of women. In many Western countries, there now are struggles for power as various professional groups and academic disciplines vie for authority through competing truth/knowledge claims. Unsettling the regimes of power/knowledge which surround responses to domestic violence has become one of the aims of this research project.

Language and discourse

Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration and struggle. (Richardson, 2000, p. 929)

As Richardson (2000) explains, from a PM/PS perspective, language is central to our understanding about the ways in which language, subjectivity, social organisation and power are linked. She illustrates how this works with reference to domestic violence, suggesting for example, that if a woman experiences abuse as a feature of a 'normal marriage' or as a 'husband's right', then she might not see it as something that others would call domestic violence. In this study, it was possible to see how a woman's interpretation of what was happening to her could be based on objective evidence (such as her injuries), her subjectivities (her sense of herself as passive, loyal or feisty), and inter-subjective meanings created by others (such as her partner, his parents or me as a researcher) making and reflecting meaning. The women who had lived with violence constructed their experiences in many different ways. These constructions continued during the interviews, mediated through our language use. As L. Kelly (1988) noted,

having the language with which to name experiences of violence, allows new meanings to be attached to those experiences:

A major contribution of feminist social action around sexual violence has been to provide and create new words with which to describe and name our experience. For example, the terms *battered woman* and *sexual harassment* did not exist 20 years ago. (p.115)²¹

The notion of discourse

The notion of discourse requires us to accept the centrality of language, but goes beyond linguistic formation. McNay (1994) has drawn on Foucault to describe discursive formation as something more than the way words are put together; as “a structuring principle which governs beliefs and practices, ‘words and things’, in such a way as to produce a certain network of material relations” (p. 69). According to Bacchi (1999):

discourse is meant to capture the ways in which language limits what can be said. This is because existing language reflects commonly accepted ways of seeing, or frameworks for organizing social existence. (p. 164)

From this perspective, discourses can be totalising, hegemonic, hierarchical and oppressive. For example, C. Fisher (2000) notes that in the context of responding to domestic violence, medical, legal and social work discourses collude to oppress victim/survivors of domestic violence by denying the significance of their experiences around non-physical abuse:

The state's position articulated through social policy is mirrored in legal and medical institutions which also give pre-eminence to violence in its physical forms. ... Women's intimate experiences become subjugated to the scientific discourses of law and medicine and their experiences become reinterpreted to fit both legal and medical models. As fear and continual psychological abuse are not addressed in legal and medical institutions and given only token acknowledgment in social policy responses, women's experiences of non-physical forms of domestic violence all but disappear. (p. 5)

²¹ However, Ashcraft (2000) notes that efforts to create new language to represent new meanings (and new power relationships) are likely to be resisted and/or appropriated by the dominant (that is, patriarchal) society.

D. Smith (1990) described how particular discourses are privileged and then embedded in the various organising systems that professional disciplines use to identify, record and respond to phenomena. For example, women's refuges, funded by the state, collect and forward to a central data collection agency, extensive statistics on the women who use the refuges (C. Fisher, 2000). However, they are not asked to forward information about the perpetrators of abuse or the context in which the abuse took place or the woman's assessment of why her partner was abusive. In this way, even from within a discursive realm heavily influenced by feminism, domestic violence continues to be constructed and recorded primarily as a problem for women, with the 'woman as problematic' (Flax, 1990). Flax has noted how feminist discourse frequently and "ironically privileges the man as unproblematic or exempted from determination by gender relations" (p. 48). Thus, through processes of discourse formation (including the privileging of certain kinds of power/knowledge), victims and perpetrators of domestic violence are *discovered* but the perpetrators largely remain invisible (Burke, 1999; Kelly-Gadol, 1987) and their behaviour 'underanalysed and underproblematized' (Bacchi, 1999, p. 168).²² Horsefall (1991) has stated:

The problem [of domestic violence] has been named, studied and 'explained' but in a superficial, bloodless, distant and perpetrator-less way. (p. 7)

From a PM/PS perspective, discourses are pervasive and everything is taken as 'under the sovereignty of discourse' (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Nothing escapes the gaze. Interpreting Foucault, Kendall and Wickham note that while many things exist materially and in that sense are non-discursive, few, if any, material things exist outside a discursive realm.²³ For example, a woman's body, her house or food, exist as real, material objects. However, within the discursive realm of the patriarchal family, a

²² Milner has suggested that the same thing happens in relation to child abuse where the system enables "most men to disappear from the system at all stages of the investigative and therapy process by increasing the spotlight on mothers" (Milner 1993, cited in Milner, 1996, p. 115).

²³ Hacking (1999) has made a similar point.

woman's body may become *mother* or *wife*; her house the *family home* and food a *deserved meal* (for the man), imbued with meaning and association well beyond its materiality as food. Thus, spoken in the Family Court, the words *family home* take on another set of meanings to do with stability, neighbourhood and continuity.^H

Like Jupp and Norris (1993) who noted that words become imbued with meaning and association on the basis of 'where they are used, by whom and to whom' (p. 47), Bacchi (1999) has argued for the focus with language to be, not on abstract terms, but on 'situated usage, on context' (p. 164). Discourses are not necessarily or always universal or totalising in their capacity for oppression. PM/PS theorising suggests that discursive practices operate through actions (often as speech or writing) and are not disembodied entities operating within structures and institutions independently of people. These postmodern understandings of discourse place a greater emphasis on deconstructing the way in which language is used to establish and maintain discursive practices. Therefore, deconstruction, as well as showing how discourses have been formed in the first place, can show where and how opportunities exist for them to be resisted, undermined and changed. Discourses can be thought of as unstable and shifting, and therein lies the power of everyday practice and everyday language use:

If you want to see discourse at work, take a look at the website for the Blackshirts (Abbott, n.d.). Marriage, children and family have powerful taken-for-granted meaning. This is about men's rights to dominate women disguised as men's obligations to protect the family. Scary. Very scary.

The rules delimit the sayable. But ... they do not imply a closure. In practice, discourses delimit what can be said, while providing the spaces – the concepts, metaphors, models, analogies, for making new statements within any specific discourse. (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, cited in Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 41)

According to Jupp and Norris (1993), "a discourse does not exist in isolation but in relation to others" (p. 47). Discourses operate in relation to one another; conflicting, colluding, interrupting. Methodologically, in this study, notions of language and

discourse have been important in the process of analysing the key data sources; that is interview transcripts, brochures and other documents and texts. Theoretically, these concepts have been important in understanding how various discourses (such as feminist, medical, legal, social work, masculinist) interrelate and overlap to create (or invent, discover) objects and ideas (represented by language) about how to respond to domestic violence. For example, currently in the West Australian social policy domain, a discourse of family violence (conservative) is interrupting the discourse of domestic violence (explicitly feminist) which has been dominant (although resisted) here for the past decade. On the surface, these debates and struggles (manifesting themselves through draft strategic plans, responses, reviews and action plans) appear to be just about language, words and definitions. However, a reflexive posture towards language and discourse can provide some insights into the processes of discursive formation which are under way, and subsequently, how they can be resisted, challenged and altered.

The discursive practices of domestic violence

In the academic and practice literature on interpersonal violence, there is considerable debate around the appropriate words to use when naming, describing and accounting for violence perpetrated in intimate relationships (Bagshaw & Chung, 2000; Gelles & Loseke, 1993; Yllo, 1988). Contestations around language are usually (if not always) contests about power. In essence, who has the right to claim certain things through the use of certain language?

In this study, I use the term *domestic violence* to describe violence perpetrated against women by a current or former intimate partner. I use the term to honour the work of feminists who first named the problem and brought public, formal attention to what previously was regarded as a private, domestic issue (Daniels, 1999b; Murray, 2002; Schechter, 1982; Yllo, 1993). For me, domestic violence can be constructed as a *kind* of family violence, as a construct which sits under the broader and more inclusive umbrella of family violence, alongside (and often interconnected with) elder abuse,

child abuse and other forms of kinship violence (Tomison, 2000). This naming and framing of domestic violence as a term synonymous with wife abuse, battering and 'men's violence to known women' (a term used by Hearn, 1996a, 1996b) creates space for men to begin investigating, naming and framing their own experiences of violence at the hands of women and same sex-partners.

According to Hacking's (1999) notion of [social] constructionism, we can recognise the materiality of things at the same time as we recognise that their location within a range of different discursive realms can make the 'idea' of something ambiguous and contested. A victim of domestic violence is real enough, as are her injuries, bruises and humiliation, but the idea of her as a *victim of domestic violence* is socially constructed at a number of interrelated levels. For example, there may be a general agreement that if I/she has bruises or physical injuries then I am/she is a victim of something but not necessarily domestic violence. How people construct the matrix of events, people and places around certain acts and activities will determine the meaning they place on them, in this case, whether or not they consider me/her to be a victim of domestic violence. Hacking (1999) has noted however, that once people ascribe to themselves (or have ascribed to them) a particular classification and label (such as victim of domestic violence) then they may find themselves involved with other people of the same *kind*, as well as institutions and practices which like them, have taken-for-granted meanings ascribed to that classification (p. 104).

Understanding the *idea* of domestic violence comes about through the formulation of a definition (such as the one cited earlier), as well as through the formulation of other related categories and labels such as victim, survivor and perpetrator. Within an academic environment, and at the level where practitioners respond to domestic violence, much of this formulating of definitions, categories and labels happens in the context of 'disciplinary discourses' (Agger, 1990) which, like those surrounding domestic violence, have been effective at 'disciplining the disciplines' which take an interest in the problem of the abuse of women by their male partners. These disciplines (predominantly law, medicine and something loosely called social work) (C. Fisher,

2000) have been disciplined to adopt particular language/s in relation to domestic violence. Despite the profound differences and disagreements between members of the academy interested in domestic violence, there is a general agreement that the word victim (or survivor or victim/survivor) describes a woman who lives with violence and that perpetrator identifies the man who uses violence against her. These words (victim/survivor, perpetrator) reflect a feminist standpoint in that they attribute a particular meaning or interpretation to certain behaviours. However, language reflects and reinforces dimensions of power. Although it was feminist advocates of abused women who chose the language of victim/survivor and perpetrator (in order to politicise domestic violence) as Chung (2001/2002) and K. Healy (2000) note, this language also has served patriarchal interests by suppressing alternative identities for women, in particular identities associated with agency and resistance.

The label perpetrator generally is used for men who use violence within the family, whether domestic violence or child abuse. The terms rapist or pedophile are likely to be used to describe men who sexually assault women and children with whom they have no current or prior familial relationship. Like the label of victim or survivor, perpetrator denotes a fixed subjectivity and often is resisted by men who have used violence within their families (Milner, 1996). In this document, I have tried to respect the wishes of participants who resisted the label perpetrator but have found it difficult to find a substitute. One way of avoiding totalising identifications is through *undisciplined* language use and so I occasionally have used terms like ‘men who use violence in relationships’ or ‘men who abuse known women’. However, playing with language in this undisciplined way so that it doesn’t settle the label of perpetrator firmly onto men who use violence, can be seen as dangerous rather than subversive.²⁴

²⁴ At the *Expanding Our Horizons* conference on violence against women held in Sydney in 2002, at the final-day roundtable on prevention, many in the audience rejected ideas which were informed implicitly by a postmodern feminism. For example, suggestions that the language of victim and perpetrator may be totalising and limiting were rejected, viewed as conservative and threatening to the long-term safety and protection of women.

Discourses both inform and are in themselves social practices, which are influential in the way they establish and maintain (and have embedded within them the scope for challenging and reshaping) particular interpretations of events. Discourses are hegemonic in the sense that they become taken for granted and we rarely question or articulate the discursive formations which have been at work influencing the way we see the world. With the issue of domestic violence for example, differences around naming, describing, explaining the problem and suggesting likely responses, have been evident since the issue regained public attention in the Western world in the early 1970s. These differences sometimes erupt into tensions and even overt conflict but rarely are they identified as competing discursive formations. Rather, they are presented as competing scientific truths (O'Neill, 1998).

Prior to the 1970s and the influence of second-wave feminism, lay and academic understandings of domestic violence focused on the individuals concerned and assumed deviance or pathology in either or both partners.²⁵ Explanations and interventions tended to focus on childhood experiences, drunkenness and ideas about the dependent, violent personality of the individual men and women involved. However, by the 1980s, a broader sociopolitical analysis of domestic violence was gaining credibility. While this analysis did not ignore personal psychology as a factor, it challenged the notion that abusers and their victims were, by definition, deviant and that the illness model was the most appropriate basis for intervention. As Yllo (1988) noted:

The sociological analysis of private troubles as public issues and the feminist insight that the personal is political came together in critiquing the practice of viewing abuse as mental illness, which could be treated only on an individual basis. (p. 39)

²⁵ C. Fisher (2000) refers to Price & Armstrong (1978) and Snell, Rosenwald & Robey (1964) as two classic examples of this kind of theorising.

To highlight the different theoretical perspectives on domestic violence, Gelles and Loseke (1993) used the notion of a lens to describe three categories of conceptualisation around the issue of family or domestic violence. From within this framework, the psychological view of domestic violence locates the predominant *cause* of the problem within the individual personality of the perpetrator and/or victim. Psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioural and humanistic psychology theories are used to explain (at least in part) the problem of domestic violence (O'Leary, 1993) and to frame the problem within the dominant medical model of diagnosed pathology in need of individual or couple treatment. Gelles' (1993) sociological lens focuses on social structures and social influences such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and the family-as-institution to explain violence in families. Those who adopt a sociological lens tend to use the term *family violence* and the issue of gender is not central to understanding the cause of the violence although it is one significant factor among others (Gelles, 1993, p. 31). Finally, the various feminist perspectives on domestic violence are shown to be concerned primarily with issues of gender and patriarchal power in their analyses and their focus almost exclusively is on violence perpetrated by men against women with whom they are, or have been, in an intimate relationship.

Gelles and Loseke (1993) positioned the various theories and perspectives as competing truths and practitioners were presented with a choice between seemingly irreconcilable (or at least difficult to reconcile) theoretical positions. Drawing on the theories as they were presented (as 'current controversies'), researchers were implicitly encouraged to *test* one theory against the other in order to be able to better predict (and therefore presumably prevent or treat) incidents of domestic violence. Particular epistemological and methodological approaches tend to align with different theoretical perspectives (Yllo, 1988). One consequence of this kind of framing of ideas about domestic violence has been that it has encouraged researchers and practitioners to adopt one set of theoretical perspectives to the exclusion of the others, or risk standing outside the disciplinary discourses of their profession as particular theories (and associated discourses) have tended to line up with particular disciplines or occupations (Agger, 1990; Dobash & Dobash, 1998).

A feminist ecological model for thinking about domestic violence

The task of theory building has been severely hampered by the narrowness of traditional academic disciplines and by the tendency of both academics and activists to advance single-factor theories rather than explanations that reflect the full complexity and messiness of real life. (Heise, 1998, p. 262)

Dell and Korotana (2000) use the term *singularisation* to name the tendency which Heise (1998) has identified; that is, the tendency within the area of domestic violence research and theorising to assume a single cause for the problem. As Heise has noted, feminist activists have been reluctant to accept explanations for domestic violence which do not privilege a feminist analysis, because “for years, academic social science failed to acknowledge even the presence of the problem, much less to incorporate issues of power, gender, and rights into its reigning analysis” (p. 263).^H

The antagonism between advocates of the different perspectives was staggering. The debates paralleled the violence in families, with feminists trying to name the problem while non-feminists and anti-feminists engaged in the denial and minimisation which perpetrators use. Gelles and Loseke (1993) drew the parallel between violence in families and violence in the ‘family of family violence experts’ (p. xiv), which seems ironic given that Gelles’ Conflict Tactics Scale effectively distracted feminists for decades from important work while we challenged (using appropriate scientific methods of course) the empirical ‘evidence’ that women in families are as violent (if not more so) than men. I notice that Dutton (1996) seems to be getting nervous now that feminists are using his ecological model. He is alleging that the link between patriarchy and wife abuse is an ‘ecological fallacy’. Don’t these blokes ever give up?

However, since the late 1990s, some of the debates and controversies around theorising domestic violence seem to have subsided. A number of writers have proposed ways of thinking about domestic violence which challenge the mutual exclusiveness of different perspectives by drawing on ecological models, many of which are based on the work of

Bronfenbrenner (1979).²⁶ For example, Carden (1994) has referred to Dutton's (1985) *ecologically nested model* for understanding domestic violence which takes account of the different theoretical explanations of why men abuse women so that:

whether or not a given man will assault his wife is influenced by an intricate network of variables within each of four nested layers of environmental experience - (a) an ontogenic core of individual experience within (b) a microsystemic layer of nuclear and extended family members within (c) an exosystemic layer of occupation, religious and social affiliations, and neighborhoods within (d) a macrosystemic layer of society's formal rules and informal norms. (p. 563)

Edleson and Tolman (cited in Dwyer, Smokowski, Bricout, & Wodarski, 1995) have an extended view of this ecological model of causation and use different labels. They suggest a micro layer of influence (intrapersonal); a meso layer of family, social and neighbourhood influences; an ecosystem which is the collection of these networks or the community; a macrosystem of 'cultural, ethnic group, and class rules' and finally, a chronosystem 'which reflects the depth of time and its effect on all the contemporary systems at play' (p. 191).

However, Pease (2003, p. 188) warns that ecological models of explanation are limited if they are not explicitly informed by radical or transformative theorising. Dutton's ecologically nested model for example, offers a very different explanation for domestic violence if it is interpreted through a functionalist lens than if it draws on feminist theorising through all of its layers, as I propose here. As Hearn (1996a) notes:

naming and definitions of violence are themselves a social, not a natural, process. It depends on perspective: as violator, violated, observer or commentator. ... attempts at all-inclusive definitions have to be treated with caution, as they themselves are located in gendered social processes. (p. 29)

²⁶ Examples are Dutton (1985); Horsefall (1991); Carden (1994); Eisikovits & Buchbinder (1996), Heise (1998) and Bowes & Hayes (1999).

Pease (2003) and Hearn (1996a) have followed a number of social workers concerned about the conservative nature of unitary (holistic, ecological, systems) approaches to social work. Marchant (1986), Fook (1993) and Fisher and Karger (1997) have noted that systems-based social work rarely moved beyond the micro level of analysis and practice in the 1970s before its demise in the face of critical theory which emerged as the dominant theoretical base for progressive social work. Systems theory needs to include an analysis of power to be transformative (Ross, 2002)

Another problem with theoretical models of causation is that *any* model potentially reinforces the idea that having the *right* explanation is a worthwhile goal. Like Flax (1990), I see the obsessive interest in causation theories as symptomatic of the problem of gendered violence which emanates from a culture of competition, domination and hierarchy:

Thus, the very search for a root or cause of gender relations (or more narrowly, male domination) may partially reflect a mode of thinking that is itself grounded in particular forms of gender (and/or other) relations in which domination is present. Perhaps reality can have "a" structure only from the falsely universalizing perspective of the dominant group. Criteria of theory construction such as parsimony or simplicity may be attained only by the suppression or denial of the experiences of the other(s). (Flax, 1990)

These concerns notwithstanding, I have found that a feminist ecological model of causation allows me to think about domestic violence in a flexible and useful way. In addition, it complements O'Neill's (1998) typology of discursive frameworks for understanding domestic violence, which I draw on at several points throughout the thesis document.²⁷

²⁷ There is an obvious link here between theories and discourses but they are not the same. The notion of discourse as it is being used here has emerged from postmodern understandings about the role of language in the production of knowledge. To identify something as discursive is to recognise how language is being used to process truth claims rather than an attempt at a truth claim itself. Theories, on the other hand, are precursors to statements of truth. They are formulated and await verification through research in order to be recognised as knowledge or the truth about some phenomenon, in this case, causal factors where there is domestic violence.

Chapter coda

This chapter has provided an orientation to the story of this research project, by outlining the rationale and aims of the study in the context of an overt, although tentative, postmodern feminist theoretical framework.

This chapter introduces a study which seeks to identify useful ways of thinking about responding to domestic violence by drawing on a feminist ecologically nested model for understanding domestic violence. This model locates domestic violence (which is defined as violence against women by known men) within the context of a global phenomenon of violence against women. This phenomenon can be explained as an inevitable consequence of normative patriarchal cultures where there is fundamentalist sectarian, corporate and other forms of state-sanctioned oppressions (Bishop, 2002; I. Young, 1990).

In the following chapter, I describe the *complicating action* or central events of the story of this research, which in a traditional ethnography would be a methodology chapter, describing my entry and activities *in the field*. Ian's story of responding to domestic violence as a bystander, interleaves between this chapter and the next in order to exemplify the experience of informal helping.

Ian's narrative

So it was 11 o'clock in the morning and we were on our way to visit a friend in hospital. We had stopped at a small shopping centre to pick up some flowers. I waited in the car with the kids and Jacqui ran inside to get the flowers. While I was sitting there, I heard a noise and I looked up and there was a young woman standing with her back to the wall of the shops and then a guy sort of came out from nowhere between the parked cars and ran at her, yelling at her, kneeing her in the groin and pushing her back into the wall. And first of all I thought it must have been a stranger; just the way he was going off or whatever, but as it turns out it wasn't. So, I'm beeping on the horn, you know, and he looks across at me and he was really really irate at this stage. He was furious. And he gestures at me, and tells me to fuck off. And I'm thinking, okay I'm not sort of going to get out of the car at this stage because I don't want to leave the kids and he's going to ... I didn't know what. And he was bigger than me as well.

So then they disappeared out of my sight, between the parked cars. And I thought okay I need to do something. What is it that I'm going to do? At this stage, Jacqui came out of the shops oblivious to any of this and hopped in the car. And I said stay there, I'm going to go and do something. And then they started to back their car out from the carpark. And while they're backing out - she's in the driver's seat - I can hear him, I can see him hitting her and thumping her about the head and body and yelling at her and screaming and so I started to reverse out as well. She saw me reversing out and she's screaming out of the window, help me, help me, help me. I thought if I had a mobile phone I could follow them and ring the police. So then I thought okay, I just need to call the police. So I parked the car and just kept an eye on where they went. I ran inside one of the shops to use the phone to call the police and they refused to let me use their phone. I couldn't believe it. I was really angry and upset with them. They just refused point-blank. And they said, go and use the phone around the corner. There is a public phone there but I didn't know that at the time. So in the end, I thought, this is ridiculous. I'm saying there's a woman outside who's just been assaulted. She's you know, for want of a better word, has been abducted in her own vehicle, through force, I need to ring the police. No. You can't use the phone. This is for private use only. Not for the public. So, I had a few words to them, and then I ran out and I rang the police from the public phone box. And while I'm on the phone to the police, I can see this young woman walking back up the street towards the shops. She managed to get out of her car and get away from him. So I motioned to her that I was doing something and she went back to where our car was and, some of the other people who were witness to it as well, just sort of took her and sat her down while I'm talking to the police.

I'm on the phone. I'm saying, yes I can see her now. She's walking back to the shops. I explained what had happened. I described the vehicle and the person - the guy that

was in the car. And they said the police will be there soon. So then we went back over there and she was quite distressed, obviously. She was clutching her stomach and we sat and talked to her, while we were waiting for the police to turn up, and keeping an eye out for this guy in case he came back. And the police didn't show for about 15 minutes. And I'm thinking well he could come back at any stage and I was getting pretty nervous. So, I rang the police again, and they said oh yeh, they're on their way. They should be there soon.

So we were probably with her for about half an hour before they turned up. And it was during that time that we learned that it was her de facto partner. He'd been violent in the past. I talked to her about what she might think about doing, and she was pretty well connected with local services. She'd been to the women's refuge before. She said she'd probably just go back there and stay another night and then hopefully they'll help her move out. I talked about pressing charges and stuff like that and she'd kind of been there and done it before, and it was a similar sort of story. There was another woman who was there (but I didn't hear this conversation but I was told later from Jacqui) and she talked to her. She was an older woman and she had had a history of being abused in relationships before and talked to her about things saying things like, this isn't making much sense, is it? And there is a way sort of through it.

So then the police came and they took a statement from each of us and then they put her in the car and drove off. And I assume they were going to take her to the refuge so they could make arrangements for her to be accommodated that night. But that was the last we saw of her. About six weeks later the police rang me and they wanted me to go down to the station to make a formal statement. Apparently she was pressing charges and the police were going to support her to do that as well. She had a restraining order taken out and she was going to lay formal assault charges. So, I went and gave a detailed statement.

We found from her the reason that he assaulted her was because she was supposed to receive some money in her bank account that morning that he wanted to access for his own use and when she went there to check the account there was no money there and that's what set him off. He became violent then.

Chapter 2: The events around which the story hinges

In this story of the inquiry process, my interventions as an ethnographer form the complicating actions or the bones of the story (Cortazzi, 1993). This chapter gives some background to the research events, provides some theoretical framing for the methodology and describes the methods (as techniques and tools) of data gathering and analysis.

The first part of the chapter offers a poetic representation of the time between conceptualising the study and beginning the practice of it. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss ideas of truth and meaning as they relate to feminist epistemology. I draw links between postmodern feminism and various aspects of social science research in order to explain what I mean by feminist ethnography as a form of reflexive interpretation. Ideas around truth and meaning are relevant to the story in so far as they are integral to notions of feminist research and emancipatory practice. The discussion illustrates how I understand my capacities to be reflexive as a researcher. This acts as a precursor to the reflexive interpretations I make about the research process in the Epilogue, which some readers may prefer to read before they embark on the rest of the narrative. In the third and fourth sections of this chapter, I describe the research data gathering and meaning-making processes.

I am thinking about the research.
Can violence between couples
be a topic for reflection, dialogue
and action?
Get men to speak. About domestic
violence. For a change.

Why doesn't anyone confront him?
Or support him when his partner
leaves?
Use our authority of community, of
love?
Probably because community
authority is silenced and silent.

Either way I'm going for relativism.
The truth just gets us into trouble.
And gets in the way
Of creating the kind of world we
want.

Maybe action research.
About non-violence in the home.
Building community capacity to
intervene.
It's occupational health and safety
for women
Because their workplace is the home.

I visit with the local domestic
violence committee,
Set up by police districts, across
the state.
Mainly suits and uniforms and
women,
Networking and co-ordinating
ideas to stop 'dv'.
All white.

The action research idea is
fading.
But not completely.
I will talk to groups about
domestic violence.
Raise awareness. Invite them
into study.
They can tell me what they think
about what they can do
When there is domestic violence.
Community development as
ethnography.

But of course, it doesn't work like
that.
People don't leap forward.
Disclosing their all.
At least, not in large numbers.
But still enough. To begin.
To tell me their stories.

Feminist ethnography as reflexive interpretation

Theory defines what is problematic and also provides prescriptions as to how such problems are to be conceptualized. In turn, this generates guide-lines as to unit and level of analysis, the form of data to be generated, the questions to be asked of such data, the form of analysis and interpretations to be adopted. (Jupp & Norris, 1993, p. 39)

Inevitably, *what* we think about the social world (our theories and philosophies) is related to *how* we think about the world (Angus, 1986). In the Prologue, I discussed how the research questions for this inquiry found me and as the poetic representation of my first thinking with the project suggests, it was by way of a similar process that I came to feminist ethnography. Aspects of the co-operative inquiry process I had undertaken for a Masters research project had been fraught with the dis/junction between the project as truly co-operative and my doing it as part of an examinable dissertation (Reason, 1988). I still was interested in participative inquiry methodologies such as action research (Reason, 1994) and contemplated a process of inquiry whereby I would engage with members of *the community* to explore how we/they responded where there was domestic violence. Just as I had been surprised at the way in which critical theory as [Frankfurt School] Critical Theory had ignored the contribution of early feminist theorists, so I was surprised at how little the scholarship of feminist research was acknowledged in the *critical ethnography* texts.

According to Guba (1990), one way of understanding the different approaches to social inquiry is to ask how different approaches respond to questions about the nature of what is knowable (ontology), about the relationship between the inquirer and what s/he is attempting to know (epistemology) and about how it is best to go about finding out what we want to know (methodology). Using this approach, Guba has suggested that a typology of four inquiry paradigms emerges: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. This typology sits alongside Lather's (1994) four 'paradigms of inquiry': prediction, understanding, emancipation and deconstruction (p. 105). Thus, I think about the different approaches and goals of social inquiry as the four broad (but not always distinct) categories of positivist inquiry (to predict), post-positivist inquiry

(to understand), critical inquiry (to emancipate) and constructivist inquiry (to deconstruct).

Lather (1994) has placed her work in the emancipatory column 'with great fascination for the implications of deconstruction' (p. 105). With this project, I wanted to place my work in the deconstruction column and hold onto the possibilities for emancipatory practice and ideas. I also spent time wondering whether I needed to place myself/be placed in any column at all. In this study, I have tried to enact a process of reflexive inquiry, working with what Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) identify as 'layers of interpretation' (empirical, hermeneutic, critical and post-modern) as they affect the research process and findings. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) avoid the 'science wars' (Flyvbjerg, 2001) by illustrating how social researchers can engage with levels of interpretation with qualitative data.²⁸ They suggest a process of spiralling through different layers of analysis via: interaction with the empirical data (interviews, observation and text); single-level hermeneutic interpretation (reflection on the underlying meaning); critical interpretation (taking account of ideology, power and social reproduction); and self-critical and linguistic reflection (with a focus on the researcher's own text, claims to authority and decisions about representation in the text) (pp. 253-255). It is work at the final level which they refer to as reflexive interpretation and they draw on critical postmodern theories (drawn from the metatheories of critical theory and postmodernism) to achieve this.

Thus for me, this project of reflexive inquiry has been subjective, relativist and de/constructivist while at the same time, I have tried to mould it to be explicitly feminist, affirmative, and potentially emancipatory and transformative, in the ways B. Fawcett et al. (2000) suggest is possible. I have tried to manage the tensions created by these apparently contradictory goals by working through them in the context of the

²⁸ Oakley (1998; 2000) makes a similar point, arguing that quantitative methodologies have a place in answering feminist questions; feminist research does not demand the rejection of objectivity and statistics. According to Oakley, feminist research should focus on quality and rigour rather than methods per se.

research as practice, with the gaze fixed on where the power is located and how it is being enacted, by others and by myself. According to Lather (1994):

Oriented toward the interests of marginalized social groups, an emancipatory, critical social science develops out of the social relations of the research process itself, out of the enactment of research praxis that uses intellectual effort to work toward a more just society. Given poststructuralism's warnings that nothing is innocent, including intellectuals with change aspirations, Foucauldian (Foucault, 1980) questions come to the fore: How do practices to discover the "truth" about ourselves influence our lives? How can we learn to track the play of power across intendedly "liberatory" approaches to inquiry? (p. 106)

Through this approach, I have tried to take account of multiple voices, contradictions and complexities and the precarious nature of my role as a researcher. The process inevitably has been, therefore, reflexive *and* political (Tedlock, 2000).

Relativism and feminist epistemologies

The truth is ... The fact of the matter is ... In reality ...

Looking back, I am not sure how often I have uttered these phrases, or in what context. Most likely, it would have been during high school debates. Whatever my history with these phrases, I am aware that now I try and avoid them if I can; that I have some internal mechanism which tells me they are not useful. For me, now, the discursive nature of things means that knowledge of those things is forever contingent, partial and situated. Sharing the same or a similar understanding of something with other people (even with a lot of other people) does not, from this perspective, establish a truth around it. Thus, a statement such as: 'Women are oppressed by men' becomes problematic. It accurately represents my understanding of the nature of women's oppression and I share this understanding with many other people, but from a relativist ontological position, these things do not make the statement *true*. This relativist perspective unsettles the notion of a truth around the non-material (and much of the material) world.

This is a highly contested position which some see as undermining the potential for emancipatory theorising and practice. For example, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000):

Critical research traditions have arrived at the point where they recognize that claims to truth are always discursively situated and implicated in relations of power. Yet, unlike some claims made within 'ludic' strands of postmodernist research, we do not suggest that because we cannot know truth absolutely that truth can simply be equated with an effect of power. We say this because truth involves regulative rules that must be met for some statements to be more meaningful than others. Otherwise, truth becomes meaningless and, if that is the case, liberatory praxis has no purpose other than to win for the sake of winning. As Phil Carspecken (1993, 1999) remarks, every time we act, in every instance of our behavior, we presuppose some normative or universal relation to truth. (p. 299)

Here, like Peile and McCouat (1997) and Solas (2002), Kincheloe and McLaren demonstrate their struggle with the idea that a liberatory praxis can have an intrinsic purpose based on something other than a truth. However, for non-foundationalist social theorists our actions are best justified by reference to our beliefs and moral judgements about the right thing to do, rather than to an illusionary truth (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000). Taking a contradictory position to those above, J.K. Smith and Deemer suggest that:

any judgments about the goodness or badness of research must themselves be practical and moral judgments and not epistemological ones. For the nonfoundationalists, to move away from epistemology is to recognize inquiry as a social process in which we construct reality as we go along and as a social process in which we, at one and the same time, construct our criteria for judging inquiries as we go along. (2000, p. 886)

For J.K. Smith and Deemer (2000), the space between ontology and epistemology has been dissolved. A relativist ontology removes the possibility of anything but a subjectivist epistemology.²⁹ Any relationship between the knower and what can be known (from a relativist position) has to be intimate, active and subjective (Belenky,

²⁹ Claims that the only universal truth is that there are no universal truths are self-refuting as J.K. Smith and Deemer (2000) and H. Miller (2002) rightly point out.

Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). There can be no distant, disembodied and passive recipient type relationship with knowledge from a relativist perspective because there is nothing to be known (received) from outside of the subjective and inter-subjective realm of the knower (Nelson, 1993). The relationship, however, does not work the other way. A subjective epistemology is possible (even desirable) in the context of a realist ontology. Here, there is a real world which exists independent of our knowledge of it and while our ability to grasp and understand it fully is limited, even impossible, it exists nonetheless and can be called upon to determine reality, universal truths and, therefore, the soundness of judgements (Schwandt, 2000).

However arcane these debates about epistemology and ontology may seem, they represent deeper and more complex issues for feminist researchers (like myself) in relation to feminist research practice:

An *epistemology* is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower' (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men's experiences and observations?); what kinds of things can be known (can 'subjective truths' count as knowledge?), and so forth. (Harding, 1987a)

Harding's questions go some way to demonstrating why issues of epistemology have been of interest to feminists. They reflect my struggles in the early stages of the inquiry process, as I sought to establish my legitimacy and authority to undertake the research as overtly feminist, emergent and reflexive. Thus, a significant role for feminist social science is to demonstrate how particular masculinist and taken-for-granted ideas have been harmful to women's interests. For example, D. Smith (1990) argued that objectivity as a way of conceptualising and generating knowledge about the non-material world has established particular 'relations of ruling' which exclude and marginalise women's experience of the world (if they recognise women at all). Other radical feminist scholars such as Stanley and Wise (1983; 1993) and Harding (1987a) argued for feminist epistemologies which are subjectivist and which privilege the knowledge of women to counter the truth claims of *malestream* research and subsequently, hegemonic, masculinist discourses.

There is no single feminist epistemology but rather different views about how epistemology might be understood from a feminist perspective (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). The details of these differences are peripheral to my interests here, in part because I have found it almost impossible to establish any agreement on the meaning of some of the crucial words such as truth and reality.³⁰ However, put simply, radical/critical feminists have tended to take a lead from Marxist standpoint theory and have developed a foundationalist (or notionally foundationalist) feminist epistemology which argues that there is a truth about social relations that can be accessed best through the knowledge and experiences of those on the margins, in the case of feminist standpoint theorists, from the standpoint of women (D. Smith, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Postmodern feminists, on the other hand, hold to the notion of a relativist ontology and so avoid detailed argument about what can count as truth, preferring to explore a range of subjectivities, alert to nuances of power and the capacity to silence marginalised voices, and while privileging the voice of women, still try not to exclude the voice of those other than women. Flax (1990) drawing on Foucault, explained:

Any episteme requires the suppression of discourses that threaten to differ with or undermine the authority of the dominant one. Hence, within feminist theory a search for a defining theme of the whole or a feminist viewpoint may require the suppression of the important and discomfoting voices of persons with experiences unlike our own. The suppression of these voices seems to be a necessary condition for the (apparent) authority, coherence, and universality of our own. (p. 48)

In order to establish and maintain a feminist authority around the *truth* of women's victimisation by men, it has been necessary, at times, for feminist researchers to suppress male voices which speak of their victimisation and to suppress female voices which speak of their perpetrating of abuse.³¹ As Flax argued, these may be discomfoting voices, yet they are voices that still may need to be heard. J.K. Smith and

³⁰ The arguments seem circular because language is discursive so how you understand a word like truth will depend on your ideological position, which whether acknowledged or not, has embedded within it, its own assumptions and ideas around epistemology and ontology.

³¹ In the Epilogue, I reflect on some of the struggles I had with the representation of female violence directed towards men.

Deemer (2000), in making a case for a relativist ontology, refer to Marx's injunction that:

'our task is not merely to study the world, but to help change it.' We thereby have a moral obligation to maximize our collective influence on actual policies and practices. To do this requires that we engage across lines, that we move out from our individual standpoints and risk our individual prejudices to keep lines of connection open to others. (p. 893)

The main point of J.K. Smith and Deemer's (2000) argument is that at the end of the day, if we abandon claims to truth then there is only dialogue as a social process for the justification of claims to support action:

All relativism brings to the table with regard to the issue of criteria is that to be a finite human being who must live with and make judgments in concert with other finite human beings can be, with some frequency, very tough work indeed. (p. 885)

Finally, to enter into arguments rather than dialogue about reality and the truth claims of women's experiences (of violence or anything else), may be to collude with masculine ways of theorising which privilege the intellect over embodied experience (G. Smith, 1992). Establishing certainty and claims to authority through truth and particular kinds of (disembodied, rational, objective) knowledge are masculine pursuits. To be unsure, uncertain, ambiguous and cautious in a Western culture is seen to be weak and therefore to be female (Gilligan, 1982, 1987). Like Gilligan, I am not suggesting that there is such a thing as women's knowledge and men's knowledge, only that there are tendencies towards men and women having different experiences of the social world and therefore acquiring different knowledges. As Shilling (1993) notes, "bodies are 'generators of meaning' in the same way as language" (p. 85) and we live in gendered bodies. Thus, knowledge only ever can be what we know, think and/or feel through our minds and/or bodies. For example, according to Gondolf and Russell (1987) when men are asked about their experiences of domestic violence, they tend to focus on their intentions and motives for using violence, offering excuses such as "I didn't mean to hurt her" or "I only did it because ...". Card (2002) has arrived at similar conclusions, suggesting that women, unlike men, tend to focus on the consequences of the violence and harm done to them, such as the pain and/or the fear. Inevitably, differences in how

we live in and understand the world exist because of the ways we interact with and label our experiences in the context of our gendered bodies.

Thus, there seems to be a case for feminist epistemologies which can valorise relativism, minimise or ignore phallogentric research principles, privilege women's ways of being and knowing in the world, validate embodied knowledge/s and celebrate the uncertainties these things may bring to inquiry processes aimed at transformative deconstruction. As a feminist researcher, the challenge for me has been to value the different patterns of understanding which the research participants have brought to the inquiry process, in particular the patterns of understanding of my gendered other.

Methodological guidelines for feminist research

In their earlier works, feminist researchers such as Harding (1987b), Mies and Shiva (1993) and Stanley and Wise (1983; 1993) developed epistemological and methodological guidelines for what they considered to be feminist research.

Notwithstanding the contested positionings around ideas of truth and reality, in this section I work through two core threads embedded in these guidelines: choice of a research topic and reflexivity.

Choice of research topic

Firstly, these guidelines for feminist research argued that in the choice of a research problem or topic, there should be a privileging of women's knowledge because it has been discovered through women's practice/experience or ways of knowing. Harding (1987a) noted that:

One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the 'reality' against which hypotheses are tested. (p. 7)

According to Mies and Shiva (1993), feminist research acknowledges a 'conscious partiality' towards the object of study. They have suggested that by establishing a partial identification with the researched, we can and should seek to obtain the 'view from below', to hear the 'voice of the subaltern' and to undertake research which serves the interests of the oppressed. It generally is agreed that feminist scholarship should be useful and change oriented so the researcher is an active participant in activities and movements which struggle for the emancipation of women (Mies & Shiva, 1993; Harding 1987b). An area of scholarship which strongly has influenced (and been influenced by) feminist activism has been research on the oppression of women through forms of male violence such as rape, incest, pornography and domestic violence. The link between feminist scholarship and the naming and politicisation of violence against women is well documented (L. Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1996; Yllo, 1993). However, as a caution, Harding (1987a) noted:

Victimologies have their limitations too. They tend to create the false impression that women have only been victims, that they have never successfully fought back, that women cannot be effective social agents on behalf of themselves or others. But the work of other feminist scholars and researchers tells us otherwise. Women have always resisted male domination. (p. 5)

Recently, Fine, Weis, Wesen & Wong (2000) have made a similar point about the dangers of research which focuses on victimisation without attention to 'resistance, resilience and agency' (p. 125).

Harding (1987a, p. 11) argued for feminist researchers to research *for* women, not men or workers or institutions or bureaucrats. She asks: "Is the research project *for* women rather than for men and the institutions men control?" This question reflects the dualistic nature of her foundationalist standpoint, a view that research benefits either men or women, but is incapable of benefiting both. A postmodern feminism holds out the possibility of a both/and benefit, and for this research project, I tried to frame research questions which could inform women, men, institutions and bureaucrats, but in a way which could privilege the interests of women. Such a position accepts that research *for* women also may be research with positive outcomes *for* (some) men.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in feminist research requires researchers to be aware of self/subjectivities as powerful influences in research processes and outcomes (Williams, 1995). As a result, feminist researchers strive to recognise researcher authority and the power differences which inevitably exist between the researcher and the researched. The goal of reflexivity is to recognise the authority and power differences between the researcher and the research participants and to minimise any harm which may occur as a result of these differences (A Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1991). One strategy for achieving this, according to Harding (1987a), is for the researcher to occupy the same 'critical plane' as the research participants:

That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. (p. 9)

In this study, I sought to occupy the same critical plane as the research participants by connecting with them through a shared sense of place (our local community) and around our shared interest and experience of trying to understand and respond to domestic violence in some way. I knew some of the research participants prior to the study and I continue to have contact with some of them through various community networks. Mies and Shiva (1993, p. 38) have supported this closer connection between the researcher and research participant because it allows for a move beyond a connection of 'simple empathy' to one of reciprocity. Referring to Oakley's (1981) work, Stacey (1991) has described this aspect of feminist methodology as one which has:

generally assaulted the hierarchical, exploitative relations of conventional research, urging feminist researchers to seek instead an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her 'subjects.' (p. 112)

However, Stacey (1991) has gone on to question the idea of egalitarianism in the research relationship, saying that she finds herself "wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation" (p. 113). Here she has suggested that the strategies for achieving reflexivity (such as reciprocity, egalitarianism and respect) also encourage the formation of attachments and relationships over which the

researcher has more control than the researched in terms of how the relationship will end and how the relationship will be represented.

Stanley and Wise (1993) have suggested that another way for the researcher to achieve reflexivity is by establishing and maintaining their own vulnerability by offering an 'intellectual biography' to the researched community:

We look to the kind of research which approaches this *inevitable* power relationship in a different way. Its 'different way' is to lay open, to make vulnerable, the researcher. It therefore involves displaying her actions, reasoning, deductions and evidence to other people. (p. 168)

Thus, reflexive researchers are sensitive towards their own authority in the representation of knowledge and interpretations which have come from the research. In seeking to occupy the critical plane with the research participants, the researcher also puts up for scrutiny their beliefs and behaviours, especially by those of a different class, culture, gender or sexuality to herself (Harding, 1987a).

In the Epilogue to this document, I have explored my willingness and response/ability to be reflexive in relation to the research process and outcomes, in particular around issues of representation and my authorial/authoritative positioning as a researcher.

Feminist ethnography

Ethnography is what ethnographers *do*. It's an activity. Ethnographers inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspective on life. They interact, they take note, they photograph, moralize, and write. (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 16) [emphasis in the original]

Ethnography assumes an element of fieldwork and a focus on a particular group of people, but outside these broad parameters, there is a great deal of variation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Through its link with anthropology, ethnography originally

involved the study of the other through immersion in a culture or subgroup different from one's own. However, more recently, ethnography has been adopted and adapted by other disciplines. Influenced by critical theory and PM/PS, ethnography has taken on different forms and now is used to study elements of the social world of the ethnographer. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) make the distinction between inductive ethnography (which like other realist, interpretive methodologies, places an emphasis on the quality and quantity of data collected) and interpretive, critical and postmodern ethnographies which "put the emphasis on bold (or bolder) interpretations, on critical reflection and the problems of representation and narration" (p. 46).

According to Quantz (1992), there is no definite way to distinguish critical ethnography from other forms of ethnography although some criteria may serve to define the term. For example, critical ethnographers draw on critical sociologies and philosophies (Marxism; socialist, radical and ecofeminism; anti-racism), as the theoretical formulations underpinning their research questions:

Critical ethnography is one form of an empirical project associated with critical discourse, a form in which a researcher utilizing field methods that place the researcher on-site attempts to re-present the "culture," the "consciousness," or the "lived experiences" of people living in asymmetrical power relations. As a 'project,' critical ethnography is recognized as having conscious political intentions that are oriented towards emancipatory and democratic goals. (Quantz, 1992, p. 448)

There is a theory-method linkage in critical ethnography whereby method "is fully embedded in theory and theory is expressed in method" (Quantz, 1992, p. 448). Thus critical/feminist ethnography is reflexive in that it seeks to recognise its own politics and the potential of all research, even that which is well-intentioned, to be disempowering or even oppressive towards study participants. Simon and Dippo (cited in Quantz, 1992) made it a condition of critical ethnography that "the work must address the limits of its own claims by a consideration of how, as a form of social practice, it too is constituted and regulated through historical relations of power and existing material conditions" (p. 448). This condition requires the researcher to try to involve the research participants openly and honestly in the research process, giving

them access to information about the purpose and process of the research and keeping them informed of the progress of the study. Thus, critical/feminist ethnography assumes reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

From the beginning, this study was shaped to be critical, reflexive and political. I was interested in enacting research as a dialogical process which could create the space for shared meaning-making about informal responding; meanings created with a view to future action by me, the research participants and anyone interested in the ideas emanating from the study. The intent was for the research to be socially useful and to meet Fisher and Karger's (1997) criteria for a 'politicized social research' (p. 72). All this appealed to me and so initially I referred to the study as critical ethnography (Adkins & Gunzenhauser, 1999; Angus, 1986; E. Manias, 1998; Quantz, 1992). However, eventually I began to wonder why it was so hard to find references to *feminist* ethnography in the literature, given that feminist principles seemed so embedded within much of what passed as critical ethnography. Was it just easier to subsume feminist research under the broad umbrella of critical social science research? If you want to 'add women' (Harding, 1987a), do you then create a special methodology and call it feminist research?^H

These questions are purely rhetorical. How do we keep feminism alive if its ideas are constantly being appropriated by gender neutral framings such as critical theory and critical ethnography? As I noted before, hooks (2000b) is happy to label all the emancipatory discourses as feminist but I don't think this will go down too well with the boys. Brodribb (1992) made a good point in her argument for a foundationalist feminism when she says that "it is true that if we read/write/speak of women, very few will attend to what we say unless you read/write/speak the boys, no one will listen to you. (p. xxviii). Bit depressing really.

However, once I had declared that I was a feminist, I could see better the appropriation of feminism (and postmodernism) by critical theory and an appropriation of feminist concerns about power and reflexivity by postmodernism (Skeggs, 1999, p. 428; Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 189). On the basis of the principles of feminist research put forward by Mies and Shiva (1993), Harding (1987a) and Stanley and Wise (1983; 1993), the research I was undertaking clearly was feminist. It was a feminist ethnography of

responding to domestic violence, but not an ethnography of women who had lived with domestic violence.

Gathering data

Harding (1987a) identified three main methods in feminist research: listening to informants; observing behaviour and examining 'historical traces and texts'. In this feminist ethnography, I drew on all three methods, moving in and out of processes of data gathering and meaning-making through the life of the project, so data from one source would influence what I collected and how I interpreted data from another.

I interviewed 16 people who had experienced domestic violence as victim/survivors, perpetrators, neighbours, bystanders, family or friends.³² These people introduced me to many others (partners, children, parents, neighbours, friends, counsellors, police officers, refuge workers, church workers) through their stories and it is the stories from and about these people which form the basis for the ideas explored in this thesis. I observed behaviour, in particular my own, throughout the life of the study. In the early stages of the project, I did a series of talks to local service clubs, church and educational groups which I thought might be interested in the issue of domestic violence. At these presentations, I observed how everyday people reacted to hearing about domestic violence and the idea of informal responding when we witness or experience it. I also collected documents and texts related to domestic violence, in particular policy statements, booklets and brochures. Through my involvement with the South West Regional Domestic Violence Co-ordinating Committee (SWRDVCC) and a research project on the workplace as a site for domestic violence intervention, I accessed various

³² I interviewed one other person but the tape malfunctioned and I was unable to re-interview her. She had reflected on her experiences trying to support a friend who was living with violence and although I was unable to produce a transcript of our interview, her experiences and ideas informed my thinking and approach to subsequent interviews.

government policy and strategic planning documents in relation to domestic violence.³³ My interpretations of these traces and texts, in particular an *archive* of brochures about domestic violence, underpinned my understanding of the various discourses informing contemporary responses to domestic violence in Western Australia.

Listening to participants

When I drafted the proposal for the study, I had a notion that I would establish a form of mediated dialogue between people who had lived with or perpetrated domestic violence and those who had witnessed it and responded. However, as people came forward to participate in the study, it was not obvious which label I could attach to them and so I began to see the value simply of listening to what participants had to tell me.

People were recruited to participate in the study through a process of advertising which included an article in the local newspaper, an interview on the local ABC radio station, an advertisement in local school newsletters and flyers distributed at the talks to service clubs and other groups.³⁴ Letters explaining the study (with flyers for distribution) also were sent to two agencies which provided counselling services to men.

Of the 16 study participants, three volunteered as a result of my group presentations. Six people responded to the advertisements and two people were referred to me by others. One person responded to a flyer which had been forwarded by a counselling

³³ These documents weren't confidential or classified in any way. Involvement with these groups just alerted me to their existence and made access to them easier.

³⁴ The local newspaper did an article on the study in response to my advertisement. On the morning the article appeared, a woman phoned me to say that two years previously, she had been staying in a motel and had heard a violent assault in the room next door. She had seen the woman later in the day and had spoken to her. The manager was aware of the assault but had not contacted the police. The woman who called wanted to know if I thought she had done the right thing as she still was bothered by what had happened.

agency to men who had completed a men's group. Four people were recruited during informal conversations where they expressed an interest in the study and I invited them to participate. I had preliminary conversations about the study with another eight people. For example, on two occasions, people stopped me in the supermarket and inquired about the research. I encouraged them to contact me and in one case, posted out some information. However, neither recontacted and I did not pursue them.

The interviews took place in a variety of settings. I interviewed some people in a counselling room at the local Lotteries House complex or at the Domestic Violence Resource Centre.³⁵ Others I interviewed in their own home or workplace. The principle source of data for the study has been the text generated from tapes and notes of these interviews, which took the form of conversations in line with Miller and Crabtree's (1999) description of 'depth interviewing' and Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) notion of the 'active interview'.

There was no formal interview schedule and each interview explored the participant's practice/experiences (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 56) with domestic violence through a conversation which included some open-ended questions focusing on the issue of responding to domestic violence. For example, Lorraine was one of the participants who had spoken to me about her neighbours on several occasions, concerned about what she thought were escalating episodes of violence. When she agreed to be a part of the study, I began our first interview by saying: *Tell me about next door.*³⁶ Often, I would begin the interview by asking how the participant had become interested in the study or by saying something like:

³⁵ Most regional centres in Western Australia have a Lotteries House which accommodates small, non-government organisations such as environment centres, community legal centres and self-help groups. At the time I was doing the interviews for this project, the Domestic Violence Resource Centre was a suburban house which acted as a base for the SWRDVCC.

³⁶ Pseudonyms have been used throughout the thesis document and some details changed to mask the identities of participants.

Marilyn: *The purpose of the study is to try and get a better idea about what people out there in what we call the wider community - families, friends, people at work or school, or whatever - what is the most useful thing that they can do when people are experiencing domestic violence? And what things might stop them being useful?*

My first approach to the data was an attempt to categorise the study participants, to give them a label such as victim, perpetrator, bystander, close friend or neighbour. But categorisation is a modernist process and a beggar of certainty. Even at this seemingly simple level, there were no clear categories and not much certainty. Some participants spoke about their experiences as victims *and* perpetrators of domestic violence; as victims and witnesses; as perpetrators and witnesses or as witnesses and formal helpers. Thus, it made sense to consider the spaces from which people had responded to the study, their *domains of experience*, rather than to think of participants as having a particular identity based on them belonging to a particular category.

Seven of the 16 study participants were women who had lived with men they considered to be violent or abusive. I deferred to their definitional authority and did not attempt to judge whether or not the actions they described fitted a definition of domestic violence. For example, Carmel's experiences would not align with the definition of domestic violence used by service providers and researchers. She had not lived in fear of her husband, but as a young immigrant woman in an arranged marriage, her attempts to challenge and then leave a difficult and controlling partner meant that she endured hostility and ostracism from her ex-partner and her extended family. She saw this as a form of domestic violence. At the time of our interview, all of the women considered themselves to be living free from threats of immediate violence.³⁷ In addition to authorising the seven women who had lived with violence the right to define for themselves the idea of domestic violence, I also deferred to their authority in other

³⁷ Some of the women recognised that although they now were living away from their violent ex-partners, this did not necessarily mean that they were completely safe. One woman still lived in fear of retribution from her ex-partner or his associates.

ways. Although I had begun the study with the intention of 'shifting the gaze' away from victims of violence and onto people who respond informally, it was inevitable (and appropriate) that I should continue to privilege the voices of women who had experienced domestic violence as victims and to allow their voices to influence my interpretation of the data. My rationale was that, as a single group, it was mainly women who had lived with violence who stepped forward to participate in the study, they (more than any others) had experienced the oppression of violence and they were able to speak out of their multiple subjectivities (as victim, survivor, loving partner, parent, daughter, perpetrator and supporter). I chose, in this study, to privilege the voices of the women who had lived with violence because I believed that morally it was 'the right thing to do' (J.K. Smith & Deemer, 2000).

Two men who had been violent towards their partners took part in the study. One was divorced from his partner and the other, who was living with his wife and children, considered his relationship to be free from violence. Three other people who participated in the study currently were supporting a close friend or family member who had been or still was in a violent relationship. For example, Cheryl and Rick, at the time of our interview, were sheltering a woman and her children from her husband who lived in the same town and regularly came to the house to harass and verbally abuse them. Janet's grandchildren had been murdered by their father several years prior to our interview. Although she saw herself as a victim of violence, the domain of experience she spoke from primarily was that of an informal supporter to her daughter. Ian was the only respondent who spoke from his experience as a bystander of domestic violence, having witnessed and intervened when a young man was physically assaulting his partner at a shopping centre. The other four participants in the study had been (or still were) neighbours to families where there was violence.

Experiences and observations

One aspect of the study design involved offering to talk about domestic violence to local community organisations and groups. The purpose of these talks was twofold. Firstly,

the community was indirectly supporting the research through the public funding of post-graduate students and I wanted to reciprocate with a community capacity-building dimension to the study. Secondly, opportunistically, I hoped to recruit participants for the study by increasing community awareness of it and targeting *joiners*; that is, people with practitioner-knowledge of community work and community service. I wrote to 10 service clubs, approximately 20 religious organisations and to several other education and community-based organisations such as Parents Without Partners and University of the Third Age, offering to be a guest speaker. I was approached to speak to two groups of social work students and one group of TAFE students and as a result of my canvassing of organisations, I was invited to do eight presentations to service clubs and church groups.

I realised that my experiences and observations at these talks would be significant because they illuminated elements of everyday thinking and responding to the issue of domestic violence. Consequently, I made journal entries about my experiences and observations at these talks even though I had some ethical dilemmas about collecting data without individual negotiation and consent; an issue I explore later in more detail.³⁸ My experience here seemed to resonate with Tedlock's (2000) observation that "we cannot study the social world without being a part of it, all social research is a form of participant observation" (p. 465) and as such, ethical dilemmas abound that cannot be settled once and for all (Benhabib, 1992; Fine, 1992).

Interrogating traces and texts

Although I consider the material from the interviews and my journal to be the primary source of data for this study, interrogating textual material from government,

³⁸ In the letter offering to do the presentations, I advised the group convenors that I would be making journal entries of my experiences and observations.

community-based and academic sources also has been important. The main texts analysed as part of the methodology for this research project, were brochures which a colleague and I collected from key human service agencies in our local community over a period of two weeks in 2003. These were grouped to form an archive for analysis using a Foucauldian-style *archaeology* (Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

In the next section, I look at the ways I made meaning out of the data I gathered for this study through listening to the study participants, reflecting on my experiences and observations during the life of the study and deconstructing various texts relevant to domestic violence responding.

Making meaning

In this study, the process of meaning-making was one of transforming the data into something that had meaning for me as the researcher and where possible, for the research participants. Once I had interview and journal transcripts to work with, I began ‘winnowing’ the material (Wolcott, 1990) and entering into a process of ‘immersion/crystallisation’ with the data (Borkan, 1999; Miller & Crabtree, 1999). The insights and findings which were emerging from these processes were recycled through subsequent interviews and readings. In this way, the processes of data gathering and making meaning from the data were overlapping and iterative (Lofland & Lofland, cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ezzy, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Borkan (1999) refers to the process of immersion and crystallisation as “an organizing style involving repeated delving into and experiencing of the data, leading to the emergence of insights and interpretations” at the same time as he describes it as a

“contemplative and artistic process” (p. 182) which can illuminate insights and themes from the data.³⁹ Borkan identifies a number of requirements for immersion and crystallisation to work and suggests the “critical tool is not the fastest computer or the newest qualitative research software; rather, it is the *self*, particularly an openness to *uncertainty, reflection, and experience*” (p. 181).

I used a number of different processes to make sense of the data which emerged. I came to understand that when I did the presentations to community groups, what I was observing and experiencing were for me, elements of the discourses around domestic violence enacted and embodied within my own community; often discourses of denial and *othering*, alongside discourses of confusion and shame. These interpretations stayed with me (in my memory and written in my journal) and they influenced what I read and how I looked at the interview texts. Much later, as part of writing this document (itself an element of the immersion and crystallisation process), I crafted this vignette to represent observations I had experienced as significant and powerful.

³⁹ Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have suggested that some qualitative researchers are obsessed with technical procedures while for others “analysis refers primarily to the imaginative work of interpretation, and the more procedural, categorizing tasks are relegated to the preliminary work of ordering and sorting the data” (p. 6). I saw my approach to making meaning from the research data as analogous to the process of deciphering those 3D pictures that were popular on cards and posters in the early 1990s. You are presented with the mass of dots on a page, you stare at the dots and make an adjustment to your focus and eventually, with some perseverance, an image ‘behind’ the dots appears. The dots on the page represent the gathered data. Using a range of transformative devices (such as poetic representation, thematic and narrative analysis) I ‘adjusted my vision’ to see the image beyond. Here of course the analogy ends. With the 3D pictures, there is only one image to be seen behind the dots (as far as we know). While I was able to identify *an* image using this process, I am not suggesting that it necessarily was *the* image.

I start with a church group. I'm the
guest speaker.
I've done it before about something or
other.
Fellowship to start off with.
All men and polite.

What are you talking to us about?
Domestic violence.
Oh. Dear me. Hey, you need to hear
this Joe. His wife beats him up.
We all laugh.

I'm on after breakfast.
It is a serious problem I say.
You can do something about it I say.
Listen and don't tell people what to do,
I say. (The irony lost on me at the
time.)

A man at the back is agitated.
Women abuse with words, he says.
I lashed out and they called me a
perpetrator.
I just put a hole in the door.

I agree with him.
Labels aren't helpful.
But neither is anger that frightens.
He leaves. No one follows him out.

More questions.
How often does it happen?
It's alcohol, isn't it?
I answer. Suitably expert.

Over coffee, the summing up and
thank you.
Such an interesting talk on this
important topic.

The ex-cop with the horror story has
the final say.
These people are depraved.
The audience murmurs and agrees.
Thank goodness someone has put it
back out there.

After, a man catches me up.
Do you call it abuse if she threatens to
leave him?
It causes him fear. How is it
different?
It just is, I say. And it probably isn't,
for him, I think.

Weeks later, more talks. Performative
ethnography now?
I have a script. I have a role. I
perform.
Service clubs. Church groups. TAFE
classes.

Women ask for it. They nag.
They threaten to leave. Take the kids.
Clean him out.
This is what I am told.
Every time. By some.

Then someone says: You need to talk to
Peg dear.
She does that sort of thing for us.
Always helping those people.
The reverend's so grateful.

But there is usually one. They come up
at the end.
Been quiet all along.
They have a story to tell.
Quietly.
I know what you mean dear.
It happened to me.

Making meaning from the interviews

Although my observations at the talks were significant, they were incidental to the formal research design (and ethics clearance) and I saw the interviews as providing the most significant data for the ethnographic study although my sense-making would have been different without my reflections and observations from the group presentations. Most of the interviews were taped and either myself or an assistant transcribed them, recording most (but not all) of the text and occasionally (but not often), using conversational transcription conventions to show loudness or pauses or other non-verbal aspects of the conversation. Once the data was displayed as text, I began the process of reading and re-reading the transcripts and my notes.

My attempt (as a first-off) to create categories for the study participants proved difficult and so I began to think spatially about the people I was talking to, visually mapping the domains of experience from which, or about which, they spoke. These spaces represented the *experiences* of living with, perpetrating, witnessing and/or responding to domestic violence, either formally or informally. Any one person could speak from any or all of these spaces (at the same time or across different times) although in conceptualising the data, I tended to think of a respondent's narrative voice as coming from a *primary* domain of experience. Trish, for example, spoke mainly about her experience as someone who had been in an abusive relationship, but also as someone who had supported her daughter to escape violence and as a neighbour witnessing violence:

Trish: *If my neighbours are screaming, I call the cops. In my case, I wonder why no one ever inquired: "Are you okay?" They just ignored it. My daughter has been in a similar situation. She and her child nearly died. ... When I realised things weren't going well for my daughter I just went there a lot. Sometimes they wouldn't answer the door. He wouldn't let her.*

During the first readings of the transcripts, I noted the gender of participants (in relation to their domain of experience), the events and participants in their stories (such as formal or informal contacts) and the value they ascribed to the help they sought or were

offered. For example, those who spoke from the domain of experience as a survivor/victim of violence were women while the two who spoke primarily as perpetrators of violence were men. Both men and women spoke from the experience of witnessing and/or responding to domestic violence. These preliminary patterns informed what I read and how subsequently I considered the data.

My next step in the process of meaning-making was to edit the transcripts and craft portrayals from some of the participants' stories (Ely et al., 1997). I did this primarily as a way of describing the data to myself and the participants, aware that I wanted to be able to take their material back to them in a format more accessible than 12 to 24-page transcripts.⁴⁰ Later, I became aware of the work of Smyth et al, (2000) who, like Ely et al. (1997) suggest a model of portraying students' stories which says "this is me and this is what I've been doing." The authors describe this process as a reorganisation of the "responses, explanations and conversation into a short (2-5 pages) coherent statement ... that captures the mood and style and essence of the ... discourse" (p. 30). In addition, they explain that they use a process of 'careful selection and crafting' so that most of the story is told in the narrator's language (p. 30). Some of the interviews did not lend themselves to the crafting of individual portrayals, either because the interview had been a process of reporting answers more than storytelling (Chase, 1995; Cortazzi, 1993) or because it was not possible to adequately mask the stories to protect the anonymity of participants.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For Wolcott (1990), description is a process of data transformation which stays as close to the original as possible and answers the question "What is going on?" I was reluctant to take whole interview transcripts back to participants because I wanted to protect them (and me) from the distraction (and embarrassment) of reading our stop/start attempts at a conversation with misdirected questions, unfinished sentences, pauses and contradictions. For Ely et al. (1997): "[I]t is our conviction that at times we can be more true to a person's meaning if we edit the passages – sometimes rather drastically – while leaving in enough of their pauses, colloquialisms and idiosyncrasies to give their flavor" (p. 190).

⁴¹ I tend to use the word *story* rather than *narrative* to describe the accounts people gave me in the interview (Polanyi, cited in Chase, 1995; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In common usage, story can imply a fictional account (Cortazzi, 1993) and this is not intended. I use the terms *narrative structure* and *narrative analysis* when I am talking about how I interpreted or made sense of people's stories.

While I was crafting these portrayals, I began a process of thematic analysis, coding the transcripts as themes and patterns began to emerge from my immersion in the data.

This involved identifying *units of meaning*⁴² from the text and winnowing or dropping text, often quite large sections, if I considered that the text digressed too much from the study focus. I then brought these units of meaning (words, phrases, anecdotes, stories) together within and across the interviews as themes and patterns in the data emerged.

For example, within most interviews, there were units of meaning about different forms of violence or abuse, the impacts of abuse, the practices of responding to violence, barriers and facilitators to ending violence, experiences with formal and informal sources of help and other possibilities for responding.

After this work with the interview data, I went back to most of the participants for further conversations, verification and approval to use the data in its new form as portrayals and thematically ordered units of meaning. I subsequently revisited the interview data using a process of narrative analysis.

The nature of narrative

Narrative is the representation of process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life. (Josselson, cited in Roberts, 2002, p. 139)

About this time, I began reading the literature on narrative analysis and it became obvious that while the themes emerging from the transcripts were relevant, there also

⁴² A unit of meaning was identified if it *had meaning* for me in light of the research focus. Reason (1988) used the term 'chunks of meaning' and the process I am describing as 'chunking and sorting' (p. 36).

was rich material embedded in the holistic narratives of participants.⁴³ According to Coffey and Atkinson(1996):

Precisely because it is a form of discourse that is known and used in everyday interaction, the story is an obvious way for social actors, in talking to strangers (e.g., the researcher) to retell key experiences and events. (p. 56)

Gubrium and Holstein (1997) have referred to interviews as *narrative incitement* which illustrates why people tell stories in an interview context even if we don't encourage them and sometimes, even despite our efforts (knowingly or otherwise) to discourage them (Chase, 1995; Riessman, 1993). Illustrated in the transcript and analysis of my interview with Stewart (which follows this chapter), is the way I would, at times, interrupt and ask participants a question in the middle of their story, either to clarify something or worse, to try and direct them onto a topic or issue that was of interest to me. They usually would answer my question and then weave their talk back to the story, picking up where they left off. Recognising this, Gluck and Patai (1991) commented that "narrators frequently shape their narratives according to their own sense of direction, often in the face of considerable interference from single-minded interviewers" (p. 2).

Another aspect to narrative, related to the discussion on discourse in the previous chapter, is less innocent. Narrative is a discursive practice which works through narrators to create macro level discourses in practice. It largely is through narrative (stories, myths, anecdotes) that discourses develop and are maintained. For example, notions of *the universal subject, progress, transcendence* and *human mastery* have become part of the master narrative and discursive regime of Western culture at this point in time. The mechanisms by which this has happened and is sustained, largely

⁴³ For example, in the transcript from Janet's interview, there was little reference to the role of informal responding where there is domestic violence and I extracted only a few units of meaning from her transcript in relation to informal helping. However, in taking me through the weeks, days and hours leading up to (and subsequent to) her son-in-law killing her grandchildren and himself, she revealed the extensive role played by her family in responding to this extreme act of violence, at the time and during the aftermath (which is ongoing for her daughter and all members of her family).

remain invisible and unquestioned (Freeman, cited in Roberts, 2002). According to DuPlessis (cited in Gergen, 2001):

Narrative in the most general terms is a version of, or a special expression of, ideology: representations by which we construct and accept values and institutions. (p. 56)

In essence, narratives produce particular discursive regimes which, in turn, make certain narratives, by certain groups, in certain spaces, possible and permissible. Through discourse, particular values and expectations become embodied in the relation between the narrator and the culture through discourse (Chase, 1995). However, as noted in the previous chapter, discursive practices, while powerful, are not fixed. Through narrative exchanges and the deconstruction and reconstruction of narrative exchanges (for example, those which happen in therapy and research), dominant discourses can be challenged, and subjugated and resistant discourses brought forward.

Narrative analysis

Processes of narrative analysis vary, depending on the researcher's epistemological and methodological stance. For example, much of the literature on narrative analysis comes from an interpretive perspective and seeks to identify and understand the underlying meanings embedded in the narrative. Sociologists such as Riessman (1993; 1994) use a single hermeneutic process of linguistic deconstruction, paying attention to phrasing and imagery to interpret underlying meanings from the text. With this approach, the researcher is positioned as the owner of the text whose expertise as interpreter is recognised and legitimated. The reader of the final product similarly is educated and encouraged to own the text and to make their interpretations.

However, I have found this process of narrative analysis troubling. In most research contexts, people tell us stories because they want us to focus on and believe the *content* of their stories. If we minimise the content, and foreground the structure of what they say (that is, the phrasing and imagery they use) then this seems undermining of the agency of the participant. Potentially, it breaches the implicit contract between the researcher and participant which is that whatever you do with the material, you at least

will have looked at it openly and believed what has been said. Roberts (2002) expresses a similar position:

Despite a commitment to giving the powerless a voice, unfortunately the focus on specific instances of language use as reflecting discourse can lessen what individuals are actually saying and doing with their utterances in action in social contexts (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 62-65). The focus on the given 'text' fences off a conception of an acting, social individual. (p. 119)

The same also could be said for other forms of interpretive research, not just narrative analysis. Whenever the researcher takes material away from the participant and analyses or interprets it without including the participant in the process, either as a co-researcher (Reason, 1988) or through *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), then this criticism can be made, depending of course on how the participant understands the purpose of the research.⁴⁴

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (cited in Roberts, 2002) have offered a model for thinking about the different ways narratives can be analysed. They view the different approaches to narrative analysis along two dimensions: holistic versus categorical (which considers whether the whole story or only part of it is to be considered) and content versus form (with the latter concentrating on the structure and form of the story rather than the content). This model suggests four different forms of narrative analysis. The thematic analysis I already had undertaken with the narratives fell into the content/categorical quadrant. Once I had crafted the portrayals from the data, I was interested in finding a way to understand the narratives from a more holistic perspective but was nervous about privileging form over content, for the reason noted above. I wanted to find a way to analyse the narratives holistically, using an approach which could consider content *and* form (structure). Labov and Waletzky's evaluation model offered a way of interpreting narratives by focusing simultaneously on the form or

⁴⁴ Borland (1991) described how her grandmother chastised her severely for 'stealing' her narrative and then interpreting it as illustrative of a young woman's feminist struggle against a domineering patriarch. Borland's grandmother did not consider herself a feminist and thought the interpretation was absurd. Borland's story serves to illustrate how from the narrator's perspective, there may be expectations about how a narrative will be treated.

‘internal scaffolding’ of the narrative (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997) *as well as* the content of the whole narrative.

According to Cortazzi (1993), Labov and Waletzky’s evaluation model of narrative analysis takes as a starting point, the standard narrative structure of beginning, middle and end. However, the model offers a more sophisticated version of this structure; that is, abstract (overview), orientation (the beginning which tells who, what, where and when), a complication (the middle, when something happens), an evaluation (so what?), a result (what happens in the end) and a coda (winding up). These structural units may not always appear in the same order and narrators may forgo some of them. The significant aspect of Labov and Waletzky’s model is the evaluation component which according to Cortazzi (1993):

highlights the point of the narrative, tells recipients why it was told and ‘reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as opposed to others’ (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, p. 37). (p. 46)⁴⁵

When I re-read the transcripts from the interviews, I could see how this structuring seemed to hold true for most of the stories people told me, particularly where their stories probably had been told before. For example, in my interview with Stewart, at the beginning he gave an abstract or overview of his story:

Stewart: *We had this fairly violent couple next door. (orientation)*
And she asked us if things got a bit hairy, to ring the police and we did one night. (complicating action)
The next time he saw us in our front garden, he pulled his car up and gave us a lecture about what he thought of our interfering. (result)
But I think it did have a beneficial effect in that I think he restrained himself thereafter because he thought if I make ... if there is too much going on ... they’ll do that again. (evaluation)

⁴⁵ According to Cortazzi (1993), the evaluation and result components usually are close together and either one is likely to appear first.

In the interview transcript, it is possible to see how, after providing the abstract, Stewart proceeded to fill out the details of his story and overall, followed the standard narrative structure. At different points, I prompted Stewart to move onto the next part of the story and/or distracted him with a question, sometimes relevant and sometimes not. Each time though, Stewart returned to the story. About halfway through our interview, the story finished and I prompted a discussion on strategies for neighbourly intervention. My sense when I read and re-read the transcript was that Stewart had come prepared for the interview, clear about what he wanted to tell me in order to make his contribution to the study. Using this approach to narrative analysis, it has been possible to identify and focus on the evaluation component of participants' stories. In Stewart's story, his evaluation was of a *success story* (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), suggesting that from his experience, it is possible and worthwhile to attempt to intervene where there is domestic violence. In the rest of our interview, Stewart was able to identify barriers to intervention (such as uncertainty about what you are hearing or witnessing), facilitators to intervention (such as the support of your partner) and other possible strategies (such as collaborating with other concerned neighbours).

Discourse analysis

I came to a systematic discourse analysis of an archive of brochures on domestic violence, when I realised that my original plan of establishing a mediated dialogue between the men and women who had lived with violence and witnesses (as informal helpers), was not possible or appropriate. This archive represented the discourse of formal, state-sponsored helping agencies and I was interested in understanding how that discourse resonated (or not) with the stories and understandings from the narratives of the study participants.

Jupp and Norris (1993) have suggested that there are two historical traces to the theorising which link discourse with power; one is via the work of Althusser and the other via the work of Foucault. Some of Foucault's ideas were used in Chapter 1 to explain the notion of a postmodern feminist theorising. In this study, I draw on him

further, by undertaking a Foucauldian-inspired archaeological investigation of an archive of the discourses which create (and are created by) the state and its agents in relation to responding to domestic violence.⁴⁶ As Foucault (1972) noted in relation to archaeology:

To describe a group of statements not as the closed, plethoric totality of a meaning, but as an incomplete, fragmented figure; to describe a group of statements not with reference to the interiority of an intention, a thought, or a subject, but in accordance with the dispersion of an exteriority to describe a group of statements, in order to rediscover not the moment or the trace of their origin, but the specific forms of an accumulation, is certainly not to uncover an interpretation, to discover a foundation, or to free constituent acts; nor is it to decide on a rationality, or to embrace a teleology. (p. 125)

The archaeological project undertaken for the study focused on the particular cultural practices of how the state and its funded agents in Western Australia represent normative responses to domestic violence through brochures targeting victim/survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence and the general public. Describing the archaeological project, Foucault (cited in Flyvbjerg, 2001) says that its purpose is “so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous” (p. 160).

Chapter coda

In this chapter, I have described the theoretical justifications and key events of the research process, in particular the elements of data gathering and meaning-making. The

⁴⁶ It is unlikely Foucault ever intended his *methods* to be used in this way. Foucault used archaeology to track the history of ideas through discursive formation across time, using an expansive array of archival material. He never used it to create *snapshots* of discourse in a particular place and time. Nonetheless, his approach is recognised as having a wider application (Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

chapter has been a representation of the complicating action aspect of my narrative, a retelling of the events around which the story of the research hinges. One element of the story is how it illustrates my use of self as a researcher grappling with the learning and understandings of an embodied methodology informed by postmodern feminism.

In this kind of inquiry process (as with any narrative process), there is no neat division between data gathering and data analysis. It is an iterative process whereby much of the meaning-making happens before all the data has been collected and long after the writing process has begun (Ely et al., 1997; Richardson, 2000). In this chapter, I have used poetry to express aspects of my activities and interpretations as an ethnographer (Brady, 2000) and social worker (Transken, 2002). *Thinking in between: liminality* tells a story of the time between my decision to study informal responding to domestic violence and my realisation that the study, as it originally was proposed (with participants emerging to occupy the neatly defined categories of victim/survivor, perpetrator or witness), was not going to eventuate. The prose represents a liminal space for me where I was grappling with issues of theory and epistemology. I wanted certainty and action, not vague deconstruction. And yet, as things transpired, it was deconstruction that I ended up with. *Those people out there* uses a poetic form to describe and represent my early interactions with everyday people (in a way that masks the reality of time, place and events) as I went about giving structured talks to church groups, student groups and service clubs.

An edited transcript of my interview with Stewart, interrupted by my commentary, is interleaved between this chapter and the next. The purpose is to give voice to Stewart and his ideas about how neighbours might respond to domestic violence and to demonstrate the evaluation model of narrative analysis. My commentary tracks the units of narrative structure through the interview and also exposes me as a relatively inexperienced research interviewer, desperate for data and ignorant of the power and process of uninterrupted storytelling.

Stewart: An edited [and interrupted] transcript

Stewart: *Well, I'm very interested in human relations. I'm a member of the caring professions – I would've been a nurse, something like that if I couldn't have been doing what I am doing. We had this fairly violent couple next door, and well she asked us if things got a bit hairy, to ring the police and we did one night and the next time he saw us in our front garden, he pulled his car up and gave us a lecture about what he thought of our interfering. (M: Ah, huh. Okay). But I think it did have a beneficial effect in that I think he restrained himself thereafter because he thought if I make ... if there is too much going on ... they'll do that again.*

Stewart has given me an abstract of the narrative; a summary of what the story is about.

Marilyn: *Okay. Yeh. Do you mind if I talk a bit more about that because I have been really interested in how neighbours respond? So this couple, had you lived next door to them for long when ...? Did you become aware that there was abuse happening next door, or was it only when she told you that she was concerned?*

I have prompted Stewart to give me an orientation to the story; information about who, what, where and when. This interview was one of my first and I had not realised yet the importance and significance of just letting people tell their stories.

Stewart: *No, it was loud enough for all concerned, well within range. They had been in there a year of two. Everything was sort of hunky-dory and then apparently ... things started going wrong. I suppose it was ... the whole thing sort of escalated and only really got violent within the last six months or so. But it was sort of brewing. And, eventually he moved out and she took him to court and got the house and that really upset him, because he put his all into that house. You know. And there were all sorts of incidents. She was walking down the street with her lawyer one day and he drove up onto the footpath. So he got a few warnings from the police.*

Marilyn: *So when she came and asked you to phone the police if you could hear, if you heard... Did she ask you to ring the police if you heard a loud noise?*

Stewart: *It was just before he left home, I think.*

Stewart has provided some elements of a historical/generalised narrative here, leading up to the complicating action of calling the police. He has given some more of the orientation information. I continue to prompt for more orientation elements of the narrative so the picture is clear in my mind and Stewart provides these, even though he is being distracted by my questions.

Stewart: *Well, she used to come and borrow things, like having young kids she couldn't get out to do the shopping at times. ... Well, yes, she did ask us at some stage what we could hear and we said, well yeh we hear you having quite vociferous disagreements about something or other.*

Marilyn: *So the time that you rang the police, was it because you heard voices escalating (S: Mmm) and anything else? Or that was enough for you to be aware that there was probably a problem?*

Stewart: *We probably wouldn't have[phoned the police] because I mean the voices had been escalated plenty of times before, but since she had said, then ... we acted.*

I have prompted Stewart to give me details of the complicating action. If I had just kept quiet it would most likely have unfolded, but my inexperience meant that I kept prompting. At this point, a silence on my part would have been more useful.

Marilyn: *I think it is just wonderful that you did. This is the sort of thing I am really interested in, is to talk to people who have acted in that way, because I am also talking to women who have been in violent relationships and what I am keen to do is try and see where we can go with this, because I think it is extremely important. Were you frightened about his reaction when you agreed to phone the police if needs be?*

This distracts Stewart from his narrative flow. I have prompted him to tell me elements of the result of the story, long before he is ready.

Stewart: *Well, considered it a possibility but I saw no reason why I should just stand back and let her get damaged in any way. So ... yeh ... take my chances and ring up. I think these things have to be managed, you can't just leave. ... The neighbours on the other side, we used to discuss it with them because they could hear what was going on too. It wasn't just ...uhm ...we were discussing the noise that went on up there.*

Marilyn: *So ... it was the next day, after you rang the police, it was just one time that you had to ring the police? And on that occasion they came?*

Stewart: *Yeh, well they must have. They must have been very quick too.*

This information summarises the complicating action of the narrative. Again, I could have left Stewart to tell the story in his own way but I prompt him and he is forced to give other aspects of the narrative out of sequence. Keen to collect data, I effectively have taken over the narrative and what began as Stewart's attempt to tell a story has evolved into a question and answer session with me assuming control.

Marilyn: *So the next morning, he saw you outside and then approached you? (S: Yeh). And what was his manner like? Was he aggressive, or just wanting to ...?*

Stewart: *He was itching to dob someone but he was controlling himself. ... He went on about not having any privacy, and lack of trust in... An intelligent sort of bloke. Knew what he could say and not overstep the mark. [I didn't feel I had been warned off] in the content of the words, but in perhaps the way they were spoken. The sort of emotional content – it was to a certain degree threatening.*

Marilyn: *A warning not to do it again?*

Stewart: *Possibly there was that in it, but I said NO. I think it was actually, because I seem to remember that I said, No, you create that sort of fuss again, and we'll ring the police again.*

Marilyn: *And what was his response to that?*

Stewart: *He was quite unhappy about it. But he didn't see that there was much he could do about it.*

Marilyn: *Right. Okay. And your wife, was your wife happy with that? Did you feel it was a joint decision or was your wife nervous about taking that kind of stand?*

Stewart: *[My wife] is very much against, against wrong-doers. I couldn't say that we discussed it – it was just automatic. I bowed out fairly early in the conversation and [my wife] took over and delivered one of her schoolteacher lectures. She wasn't going to be intimidated.*

This is the end of the evaluation component of the narrative. I then prompt Stewart to proceed to the result, to tell me what finally happened.

Marilyn: *Okay, so after that incident, it wasn't very long after that What I hear you saying is that you don't recall there being any other incidents that you were worried about, in terms of having to phone the police again.*

Stewart: *We didn't have to phone the police again, but I think that is very likely because he left home. Eventually there was a court order against him and he wasn't allowed within so many hundred metres of the house.*

Stewart's efforts to tell a spontaneous narrative as part of the interview have been successful despite my interruptions and distractions. We move into more of a conversation although I am still keen for data and so I am prompting. There is still an element of storying here, but it is different. Stewart is now reporting on what he thinks, prompted to some extent by my questions but it seems to me he has thought about what he wants to say, about the contribution he wants to make to this study.

Marilyn: *Okay. So are you suggesting that in the earlier part ... before she approached you, you could hear voices raised? Did you ever think about going and approaching her, before she approached you? Did you ever think to approach her and ask her if there was something that you could do?*

Stewart: *Well, sort of. We worried about it enough to sort of discuss it with the neighbours on the other side but no, we never sort of came up with anything we could have done. I mean, we would have had to start prying and asking questions like, what is all this noise about?*

Marilyn: *Okay. And that was something that ... for you, that wouldn't have been appropriate ... to start prying with her about ... it was almost like once she asked you to intervene, then it became appropriate (S: Yeh) but up until that point it would have felt like you were overstepping (S: Mmm) the boundaries of being a neighbour.*

Stewart: *We were assuming ... well we were putting interpretations on things that we had no proof of and acting on, literally illusion.*

Marilyn: *Okay. I can't think of many other lines that I am wanting to take you down. The focus of the study is to really explore what is useful behaviour and what is unhelpful behaviour – and then to try and get a sense of what it is that encourages people to take ... to be active ... to take an active position and what hinders them from doing it so I guess what may be a useful question for me to ask is: Is there anything that would have stopped you from acting? Is there anything that would have meant that you didn't phone the police? Can you think of anything?*

Stewart: *Well, fear. But we decided we weren't going to be party to that. I mean we could have assumed that he would react violently against us – ah – whereas in the end he didn't. We stood our ground and he accepted it, literally in the end.*

Marilyn: *So, are there other things that you would like to tell me or think would be useful?*

Stewart: *Well, I was sort of imagining the sort of result you might produce and it occurred to me it might be a set of guidelines added to the Neighbourhood Watch program.*

Marilyn: *It's really interesting that you should raise that. I've only just today picked up a video about Neighbourhood Watch but I don't think it talks about domestic violence. I've never seen it.*

Stewart: *I've read through it and I don't remember anything. Well, that was ... thinking about what you were doing ... that was where my mind went. Thinking that ... a set of guidelines like that would have been very handy for us at the time.*

Marilyn: *Yeh. ... So what sort of things would you imagine would go into those sorts of guidelines? What sort of suggestions or instructions?*

Stewart: *Well, a bit about the ethics of it. About well, trying to organise a conversation with the person. How to do that in a non-threatening way, possibly would be difficult.*

Marilyn: *Do you mean with the person who is using abuse or the person who is experiencing the abuse?*

Stewart: *Oh well, the person who is experiencing it. Well, establishing in some way that abuse is going on, that they are having life made difficult for them. Ah ... it is getting facts before you act that is the difficult part because people tend to be a bit touchy about it. Well, if it was possible to establish what actually were the triggers for action, to give some indication and then what sort of action should be taken with police or shouting back, providing a distraction.*

Marilyn: *When you say 'shout back' do you want to just expand on that a bit?*

Stewart: *Well, they've got themselves locked in a little world of their own conflict, let them know that there is the rest of the world out there. Spread their awareness a bit. ... Well if they're making a lot of noise, tell them to quieten down a bit or something. Do you have to make that much noise? Yeh. Just remind them that the rest of the world exists. They haven't got it all to themselves.*

Marilyn: *Anything else?*

Stewart: *You mean what should be in such a missive? Mmm, well I think after that you start needing a bigger organisation to do things like you might involve other neighbours or a group approach or something like that or refer the situation to some organisation.*

Marilyn: *So when you say a group approach, what are you thinking about there?*

Stewart: *Well, if one person is scared to go, five might be quite happy to go. (M: Okay. Yeh.) Go as a delegation.*

Marilyn: *And talk to either party?*

Stewart: *Yeh. Lodge a protest. Do you have to do this?*

Marilyn: *Anything else? I mean you have been enormously interesting and helpful so far anyway but I'm just wondering if there is anything else.*

Stewart: *Not unless we start getting into my homespun philosophy, I can't think of anything else.*

The interview continued until the tape ran out and then beyond, while Stewart and I discussed his 'homespun philosophy'.

Chapter 3: The research result

In this structured narrative about my process of collecting, analysing and interpreting ethnographic materials to deconstruct and reconstruct the possibilities for responding to domestic violence, the result (or resolution) part of the story comes next. In order to tell this part of the story, I have posed and answered a series of questions developed from Flyvbjerg's (2001) methodological guidelines for a *phronesis*-based social science.⁴⁷

My first question asks *What is it we are looking at when we talk about domestic violence?*⁴⁸ In response, I define and describe domestic violence through the participants' narratives. The second question asks *Where are we going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia?* In response, firstly, I give a broad descriptive overview of formal and informal responses to domestic violence, drawing on material from the academic and practice literature as well as the narratives from the study participants. Secondly, drawing on an archive of brochures on domestic violence and using Kendall and Wickham's (1999) interpretation of the Foucauldian archaeology, I suggest what an archaeology of contemporary responses to domestic violence might look like. Finally, I discuss some of the discursive practices which seem to shape contemporary responses to domestic violence in Western Australia. The third question asks *When we respond to domestic violence in this way, who gains, who loses*

⁴⁷ *Phronesis* is an Aristotelian intellectual virtue based on practical value-rationality. It is a method for praxis which allows the question 'What can be done?' to be answered through a process of deliberate, ordered reflection which takes account of the way competing values and interests are mediated through power (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

⁴⁸ I use 'we' here to denote the whole community or 'polis' (Stone, 1997); that is, you, me, them and us, operating within and with/out a public policy context. For Stone, who has adopted a pluralist notion of the state, public policy can be thought of as 'communities trying to achieve something as communities' (p. 18).

and by what mechanisms of power? As a response, I discuss modernity, the patriarchal, neo-liberal state and coupledness as three sites of power where dominant discourses which frame our contemporary thinking about domestic violence are permitted to flourish.

The final question in this chapter asks *Is it desirable to keep going this way in our responses to domestic violence?* The empirical materials gathered for this study suggest that it is not desirable for us to keep responding to domestic violence in the narrowly prescribed ways we do.

What is it we are looking at when we talk about domestic violence?

In the study, the behaviours regarded or experienced as domestic violence by the research participants were perpetrated across seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks and/or years. The behaviours were enacted spatially across a wide range of domestic, social and public settings, defying the accepted notion that domestic violence only happens ‘behind closed doors’ (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Participants in the study talked about violence perpetrated in suburban homes (particularly in kitchens and bedrooms), at workplaces, on the street, at shopping centres, parties, sporting venues, in cars and hotels.

In Australia, women’s accounts of domestic violence, as they appear in academic texts and reports from phone-ins and speak-outs, have a familiar ring to them and they seem to resonate across time and space. In her story of the Nardine women’s refuge in Western Australia, Murray (2002) notes that from the 1920s, Australian women could use the grounds of *physical and mental cruelty* in separation and divorce proceedings so that:

Over the early decades of the twentieth century, domestic violence was understood both as physical 'cruelty' – women being beaten, having things thrown at them and being struck in the face – and in other ways. Women presented affidavits outlining various forms of what could be called emotional abuse, such as threats to their life, the use of 'gross and filthy language', swearing and abuse. They were also financially and socially controlled, as evidenced in specific court cases, through such mechanisms as being denied money, being left alone on an isolated farm and being left in Perth after the birth of a child. (p. 90)

There is a lot of similarity between the violence Australian women experienced in the early part of the last century and the violence women recount today. Here, I link resonating fragments of accounts from the study participants with the accounts of violence Murray refers to, in order to illustrate the phenomena we are talking about and also to demonstrate how the specific nature of domestic violence seems to have endured across time.

Women being beaten,

But while we were in Darwin actually he... he... really give me a hell of a hiding over something that wasn't even there and I went to the police - it's only just up the road from our house and they brought me home. He was the type of person if he gave you a hiding he'd just stand there and say I didn't touch her at all.⁴⁹

Like if he was planning on hitting me and it was always a planned thing for him... We had a business then so I used to spend time at the depot ... so then when my injuries – oh people would think he was so sweet - when my injuries came about then it could always be traced back to something else. He'd go oh, she's been spending lots of time out at the depot. Ground gets slippery. So then you'd get taken to the hospital – like he would have dislocated my shoulder or something like that.

I would not see him for days. A week at a time. And if you ever said anything, you'd get beaten up. Punched. Kicked.

It was just full-on beatings all the time.

⁴⁹ I intentionally have not attached names to these fragments of text in order to collectivise these experiences of violence and victimisation.

having things thrown at them,

So I hit Lucy once ... when she was telling me about an affair, her romantic adventures. I couldn't handle it. I threw a bowl that hit her in the back.

And I picked the drill up, I had the drill in my hand and I just raised it up – fucking had enough of this - and I threw it down and as I threw it down she went to walk away – and I threw it at the step and she went to walk up the step and I broke two of her toes.

and being struck in the face.

He had me out on the front verandah with a golf stick across my neck, and he'd already hit me. Punched me in the ear. I got a ruptured ear out of that.

Because one time when she went out there to collect a few more of her things and he threw her up against the cabinet in the kitchen, on the bench and he was ... he came right up to her face with his fist clenched ...

Emotional abuse, such as threats to their life,

Well, he told me, if ever I left him I will hunt you down, I will take the kids out of school and I will kill 'em. So... I had... I mean, what sort of incentive do you need to stay there, you know?

He actually plotted for me to kill myself. He actually worked out a suicide plan for me which he ran me through over about six weeks because he wanted me gone. And it would continue to talk about it over and over so I was at the point of exhaustion and would just agree to it because that seemed like the most logical thing to do.

He kept on telling me to go. If I don't go he will kill our daughter, he will kill me, he will kill our cat, our dog.

the use of 'gross and filthy language',

It's so degrading and you just feel like you're something they picked up in the gutter. 'Cause one night.... He used to get drunk sometimes too and I used to think well rather than sit there and say or look at him the wrong way, I'll go to bed and this particular night he come in... I've never been able to say what he said to me that night because it just ... I thought you asshole, you know. That night I could have literally killed him. He had me so angry because it was like, if you sit there and someone is saying all these disgusting things in your face...

swearing and abuse.

One night at the tennis club ... and here he is standing at the corner of the courts, so drunk, you fucking cunt, you fucking slut. And this is in front of 20, 30 people ...

One night we were having tea at the pub and I said oh someone's left their mobile phone on the window ledge. And he just stood up and he said does anyone own this f'ing phone? My stupid f'ing wife is getting all upset because someone left their f'ing phone. Me and Jayce just sat there. We got up and walked out. We just bolted. And the next morning he did the same thing. We went for breakfast and he carried on. ... I went to pack the car and he was standing on the balcony – right in the middle of town – screaming, ya f'n cs. Ya nothing but f'n cs.

My youngest son was about 18 months old and he got pneumonia. But a couple of days leading up to that he was really sick – croupy and that – he'd gotten up – my ex was sitting at the table drinking spirits – and my baby got up and he was sitting on my knee and my ex said what's wrong with this fucking kid? And got the bottle of rum and tried to pour it down his neck. And I'm going – you know, you try and pacify them – and you say I'll just put him back to bed. Shut the fucking kid up.

Well, see with him it got to the stage in the end where, because he was raping me and just having his own way when he felt like it, I'd shift out of that bedroom and I'd go into my daughter's room and he'd walk up and down all night - oh you're just a fucking mole, just a common friggin' slut. That used to go on all night.

They were also financially and socially controlled ...

And he used to say to me, you will eat when I tell you to eat. Because before I got pregnant with my second son I went right down to seven stone. But he would just not buy groceries. He used to say to me if you want something to eat, go up to your mum's house.

I have friends but after so many years and he got worse I didn't have any friends because I'm not allowed to visit. He wanted me to be isolated from my friends.

He was the sort of person, like if he came home from work and I wasn't home he'd go from house to house looking for me and it was a big thing, I had to be there when he got home.

I could see it was wrong but I couldn't work out what the difference was because I'd never been brought up in a normal family anyway and nothing to weigh it against. And he steered me away from normal friendships and relationships

with other people. So it became very insulated and I think that is where domestic violence breeds its best is because they know it's wrong so it does steer you into a place where they have that bit of extra power so you can't differentiate anymore, after a few years that is, where right and wrong actually stands.

And he checks the phone to see who she's been phoning. Checks the phone bill. He went berserk at her for some email about – something about finding someone special or something. It's just junk. Spam email.

With Luke, I got flown to Perth with him 'cause it was a low-lying placenta and I started bleeding. Got up in the morning and I had to iron his pants. I stood there with a towel between my legs 'cause I had no pads and I had to iron his pants before he'd take me out the hospital. There was blood coming out everywhere and I'm standing there ironing his pants (laughs). And then he took me up the hospital and they flew me to Perth. That was on the Monday. Dropped me off at the hospital, they flew me to Perth and never heard from him. Nothing. They wanted to keep me in hospital and I was just freaking 'cause Jayce was at home and I was just freaking out. And thinking I have to get home to her. So they let me out but told me I wasn't allowed to do anything. And Steve's dad arranged to drive me half-way and Steve would come across and we'd do it that way. We got half-way and Steve was drunk as, so I had to drive the rest of the way home. We had to get back.... We had no-one to look after Jayce. It took me until 11 o'clock that night. So we had to keep stopping, [I was] walking around, going to the loo. I was basically in labour. Had Luke the next day. I was in labour.

Establishing the idea of domestic violence

Certain behaviours are regarded as domestic violence because of the context in which they occur, rather than just as a consequence of the acts and activities themselves. For some of the women in the study, our conversation formed a part of their process of constructing their experience as domestic violence rather than as something else, such as drunken behaviour, a bad marriage or unwelcome sex:

Bella: *I think he just hassled me, Marilyn. He used to... I think that's domestic violence. He wants to control me, anything. I just have to say yes all the time. But I think sometimes I think you are too good, he will take advantage, he will take you for granted.*

Helen: *But he used to just ... just take sex. He used to shove pillows over my face so I couldn't scream out ... just you know, really force me down on the bed*

*and just help himself, you know, he'd just have a big grin on his face as he would just say well you know if you didn't want it I got it anyway ... but ... that used to happen a lot.*⁵⁰

All of the participants, except one, recognised the behaviours they had experienced, perpetrated or witnessed as something they called (or thought I might call) domestic violence. The exception was Denise who was never really sure if what she and her partner witnessed next door was domestic violence:

Denise: *I really wavered about whether I would call it domestic violence. One time, there were two women yelling at him, her and I think it must have been her mother. He was saying if you don't get out of here I don't know what I'll do. Then we saw the older woman run outside with him chasing her. The younger woman came out too and she looked really scared. She didn't look fearful often. This was the only time she looked fearful. About that time, she left him for about a month.*

She would often go and be gone for about 24 hours and then she'd come back. You'd hear her knocking on the door saying hi it's me, I'm home.

Sometimes it really sounded as though she was provoking him. She'd scream at him and call him a psycho-cunt. He'd really abuse her and call her a slut and a whore but it was her that called him psycho. It was very very ugly. Sometimes your sympathy would like be with him and not her.

Johnson and Campbell's (1993) clinical typology of violence has offered a possible explanation why Denise was unsure about what she was witnessing. In their research of violence in disputed-custody divorces, they identified a category of 'male-controlled interactive violence' where the violence began as 'mutual verbal provocation and insults' but eventually escalated into physical violence. At this point, the "overriding response by the man was to assert control and prevail by physically dominating and overpowering the woman" (p. 195). Johnson and Campbell use the term 'patriarchal terrorism' to distinguish dangerous and vicious violence directed towards women by

⁵⁰ Yllo (1999) has been critical of what she sees as a silencing of marital rape in the Duluth model. Although sexual violence is depicted as central to the issue of power and control, it is dealt with only minimally in the literature emanating from the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

their intimate partners from ‘common couple violence’ which appears to be a form of low-level mutual violence acted out in some couple relationships. However, these constructs may not be all that useful in terms of assisting women and children living with violence. As Johnson and Campbell and Bagshaw and Chung (2000) note, It could be dangerous to assume that these constructs describe two distinct, non-overlapping forms of violence and therefore, that ‘common couple violence’ is not potentially dangerous or lethal (Bagshaw & Chung, 2000; Johnson & Campbell, 1993). As Fraser (1999) has noted:

the earliest challenge confronting participants in the field relates to understanding domestic violence in complex and diverse ways, without calling everything, or conversely, only the most torturous and obvious aspects of domination, domestic violence. (p. 34)

Where are we going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia?

Firstly, in response to this question, I introduce the practice contexts for responding to domestic violence in Western Australia. Secondly, I look at the focus of our responses through an analysis of the narrative accounts of the participants and the academic literature. Thirdly, I deconstruct an archive of domestic violence brochures to illuminate the rules which human service agencies follow when they communicate about responding to domestic violence. In the final section, I explore what appear to be some of the dominant discursive practices influencing how we respond to domestic violence in Western Australia.

The practice contexts of responding

During the early stages of this study, I saw my focus as informal *helping* where there is domestic violence. However, once I began talking to research participants, I realised

that the word helping implied too much about the intent and outcome of witnesses' behaviour.⁵¹ Not every witness responded with the express intent of helping. Some people's responses were motivated by concern for their own or their family's wellbeing; to protect themselves from involvement with the violence or to minimise antisocial behaviour in their neighbourhood. When I realised this, I began to use the term *responding* to capture the intentional responses of everyday people who witness or become aware of domestic violence, regardless of the intent or outcome of their actions. I have used responding to mean voluntary, intentional behaviour rather than just spontaneous re/actions emanating from anger or fear. Responding is considered *informal* when it does not have the auspice of any formal private or public organisation such as a government agency, church, workplace, or voluntary organisation.

The contemporary Australian welfare state, to the extent that we consider it still exists (Jamrozik, 2001), operates through a 'mixed economy of service delivery' (McDonald, 2000) which generally is taken to include four sectors: government (federal, state and local); the private-for-profit (or market) sector; the private not-for-profit (or third) sector and the informal (or fourth) sector.⁵² For the purposes of this study, the fourth sector is taken to mean family, social (friendship, church, sporting club and other association affiliations), work/student and neighbourhood networks (including bystanders).⁵³

⁵¹ I have used the term *witness* as a noun and a verb at various times throughout the document. As a noun, there is the taken-for-granted meaning of witness as an observer to an event. The verb has a more agential meaning in the sense that 'to witness' implies a cognisance of an event beyond simple observation. Further, to 'bear witness' is a term which implies definite action, either to speak about an injustice or to intervene, in the way suggested by Bloom and Reichert (1998) in relation to domestic violence.

⁵² There is no universal labelling of these sectors. For example, Scott (1981) referred to the family and neighbourhood sector as the first sector, followed by private enterprise and then government. In recent years, the private, not-for-profit sector has become generally recognised as the third sector; for example the *Third Sector Review* journal.

⁵³ Within the context of human service delivery in Australia, all sectors are involved to varying degrees in responding to domestic violence. For example, the state provides crisis intervention, hospital services, income support, housing and criminal justice responses. Private, for-profit doctors, psychiatrists and counsellors and private emergency accommodation services (such as hotels and caravan parks) operate in the market sector. The third sector (which includes churches, charities and non-government agencies) provides refuges, counselling, support, advocacy, legal advice and accommodation services. The informal or fourth sector can provide information, advice, counselling and support, income support and crisis accommodation, most often to victims of abuse but sometimes also to perpetrators.

Services which operate within a public policy domain (in particular government and third sector services) respond to domestic violence primarily through processes embedded within the disciplines of law, medicine and social work/social welfare (C. Fisher, 2000). Responses from the market sector are informed usually (but not always or only) by the imperative for providers to make a profit. Informal sector responses tend to be more chaotic and anarchic (Dimitriadis, 2001), informed by prevailing attitudes, values and norms in relation to gender, violence, family and community life.

Unless informal supporters have done their own research, theoretical and technical information will not be strong influences in the way they see family violence. Inter-personal communication and community-based values about such relationships are the stronger influences. (Cultureshift, 2000a, p. 14)

The focus of responding

In this section, I present and frame some of the contemporary literature about responding to domestic violence alongside my interpretations of the research participants' narratives. In order to frame the academic literature, I worked at two levels. Firstly, I worked with three focus areas of responding to domestic violence: the safety and wellbeing of victim/survivors of abuse; accountability, treatment and support for perpetrators of violence; and community education and awareness in response to domestic violence. Secondly, within each focus area, I attended to the formal, informal and (what I have called) *from within the couple* ways of responding. Much of the academic and practice literature tends to assume that only others (that is, people other than the members of the couple under our gaze) respond or intervene where there is domestic violence. However, here I include the responses of the perpetrator and the survivor/victim as they too *respond* when there is violence. In this section, my interpretations of the participants' narratives sometimes sit alongside and support the academic literature. At other times, the stories and ideas of the participants interrupt, contest and contradict the work of academics and practitioners.

Safety and support for victim/survivors of abuse

Formal agency responses towards victim/survivors

The provision of safe emergency accommodation, support, counselling, advocacy and legal services for women has been a significant aspect of the public policy response to domestic violence (Felter, 1997; Weeks, 2000). However, despite most formal service providers' overt commitment to the empowerment of their women clients, client satisfaction varies a great deal. In Patton's (2003) study, amongst those women who accessed formal services, domestic violence-specific services tended to be viewed as more helpful than generic services. In relation to generic services, Patton notes that "for the most part ... women variously encountered a sympathetic but unhelpful response, indifference, avoidance of the issue, discomfort or a response that was sympathetic to the perpetrator" (2003, p. xiii). For example, studies in Australia and overseas repeatedly show that police tend to hold negative stereotypes of victim/survivors (Hatty, 1990) and that their responses vary considerably (Bourlet, 1990; Dave, 2000; Katzen & Kelly, 2000; Edwards, cited in Mawby & Walklate, 1994; Patton, 2003). Katzen and Kelly (2000) summarise:

Australian research has found that police have failed to attend all domestic disputes, rarely charged offenders even where there was sufficient evidence, and used referral agencies as a substitute for criminal action. Other criticisms have been directed at police officers' apparently unsympathetic and unhelpful stance towards victims. (p. 3)

Recently, the West Australian Ombudsman investigated police responses to assault in the family home and found that inconsistent and at times inadequate responses acted as a threat to women's wellbeing and safety (O'Donnell, 2003). O'Donnell's findings resonated with what I heard from study participants who spoke of police responses to requests for help as ranging from timely and effective to reluctant and disastrous.⁵⁴

In the study, only two of the women who had lived with violence mentioned calling the police to intervene during or immediately after an assault. Hannah went to the police

⁵⁴ Wendt, Taylor and Kennedy (2002) note that rural women may be particularly vulnerable to inadequate protection from the police because perpetrators and police officers may share common social or sporting interests.

station after her husband gave her *a hell of a hiding* but the police took her home and spoke to her husband who denied it. For Geraldine, the police response initially was poor but then helpful (when they took her to a safe house once they realised her husband had a history of violence, and access to firearms). However, they advised her against pressing charges.⁵⁵

Geraldine: *The last 10 days that I spent there he actually had me bailed up at the house and he raped me repeatedly over that 10 days until I rang the police one day and said I think my husband is going to kill me. When I rang them and I complained about him and everything and they go tell me what's going on ... and he said go around to your mother, you're just having a hormonal attack and I said no, I don't think I am. I think there is something much worse going on. And then he said, what's his name? And he sounded really bored. I could hear him typing into the computer and he comes back to the phone and he says can you get to a car? If you think he's going to kill you, you're probably right.*

I went to the police station. I actually... When I was grabbing the baby, I found one of his guns – he had illegal firearms. I found one in the baby's room so I threw it in the nappy bag and when I bolted I gave it to the police and said, you know, because I thought they would arrest him and send him to jail over it – wrong! But it did mean that they could go out and search the house and... it bought me some time while I was at the police making a statement. And they recommended that I didn't press charges for the violence. Yeh. (M: On what basis?) Well, they couldn't protect me. They could not stand over me for the next 24 years... for the rest of my life and the best thing I could do was just let it go, put it behind me and move on.

For Janet and her family, the police response had tragic consequences. Police rigidly followed protocols about crossing jurisdictions and used inadequate resources to locate her son-in-law after he threatened to kill her grandchildren:

Janet: *But in the letter he said, he said the next time you see these children will be to identify them in the morgue. And that was written in the letter. Now, why didn't the police take that seriously? They did not. Because for one minute they did not think that he would do it, at all. I think if they had got that plane in the air. They had plenty of time to get that in the air, they had plenty of time to get other officers from other police stations and cars to roadblock those areas. They had plenty of time to do it. You would have to think ... you*

⁵⁵ In the literature on interactions between police and victim/survivors of domestic violence, stories of women withdrawing charges are common. However, as Bourlet (1990) has noted, police often dissuade women from pressing charges.

have to think the worst scenario. And that is what the police have to do. They have to think well, hey yeh, this bloke is going to kill these kids, we have to stop him. Anyway we know how. Whether it's breaking rules, like okay I have to go out of my jurisdiction, that's it, I'm going. Too bad, I'm going. And those kids could be alive today.

In the accounts of study participants, it was more likely that friends, neighbours and bystanders would contact police (to intervene and protect women being subjected to violence), than the women themselves. Participants who had witnessed violence also reported mixed responses from the police. Sometimes, the response was effective, such as in Ian's case when the police took the woman to a refuge and pursued her assailant. Similarly, the police responded quickly to Stewart's call and their involvement seemed to be effective as a deterrent to his neighbour's abusive behaviour. However, Sally was shocked that the police couldn't or wouldn't intervene to stop her neighbour Tracey's former partner from coming to her home and abusing her. This was despite there being a restraining order in place:

Sally: *But the first thing you think of when someone is getting beaten to crap is oh my God, let's call the cops. And the cops have been completely unhelpful, and even if they have tried to be helpful, she has got something against them anyway, and she doesn't want them to help. I just call the cops, 'cause that is what you do. You get taught that from like Year 1, so you just call 000 and out comes someone, and the situation doesn't diffuse as easy as it sounded in Year 1. Where is Constable Care? You have been lied to.*

In relation to medical services, survivor/victim experiences similarly are mixed. Stark and Flitcraft (1996) found that women who accessed the medical system often experienced denial, minimisation and inappropriate treatment from health professionals. More recently in Australia, a report on older women and domestic violence found that 46% of the 140 female respondents spoke to a doctor about the abuse but there was a 'very mixed reaction' with equal numbers reporting favourable and unfavourable responses (Office of the Status of Women, 2000, p. 63). Similarly, 26% of the women in a study by Patton (2003) identified the response of general practitioners as a significant *barrier* to them leaving violent relationships (p. 60).

Several of the women I interviewed sought medical intervention while they were living with violent partners, and they also found the responses varied. When Trish and Helen presented at doctors and disclosed the abuse, both were prescribed medication. Helen believed the medication allowed her to distance herself from the abuse and had been helpful. For Trish, the doctor's indifferent attitude and a prescription for medication had been unhelpful. Eileen and Bella sought medical intervention to have their abusive partners hospitalised after they had threatened or attempted suicide. They were successful in engaging medical help and the period of hospitalisation gave both women respite and time to effect a separation. For Eileen, her husband's threat of suicide came after he admitted sexually assaulting her daughter:

Eileen: *I rang the nursing post and she had him on the plane. Gave him an injection. Flew him to a psych unit and he was there for four weeks. I did a hell of a lot in that four weeks.*

Bella's husband attempted to hang himself but she discovered and resuscitated him before neighbours called an ambulance:

Bella: *After he hanged himself, I hid until he was taken by the police and put in hospital. I rang up the doctor, the doctor that was treating him, and the doctor said don't go because we are taking him to the mental hospital... I said I think he needs help very badly, he needs psychiatric things, diagnosis. And they said they think he is really very sick. And that's when I got the restraining order. [The lady psychiatrist] said, it is very hard for you. You go back to him, he will drink again. Even if he stopped for how many years? He is a chronic alcoholic.*

In her ethnographic study of domestic violence services in Western Australia, C. Fisher (2000), is critical of the medical response. She argues that like the legal model, the medical model of service delivery defines the problem of domestic violence as a series of incidents of episodic violence, ignoring the experience for many survivor/victims of prolonged and devastating abuse, isolation and control. When victim/survivors present with psychological and physical symptoms of this kind of abuse, they often are resented or ignored by medical staff. For example, according to C. Fisher (2000), hospital emergency departments tend to identify survivor/victims as 'regular presenters', which can result in "a blame the victim attitude by hospital staff who see the woman as

culpable for her own abuse, not doing anything about it and taking up valuable hospital time and resources” (p. 187). In summary, she notes:

Medical practice gives pre-eminence to visible physical injury associated with domestic violence in a way that parallels the legal system's emphasis on physical violence. Like police officers and lawyers, doctors are either not trained to, unable, or unwilling to detect injuries such as psychological damage and its physical and/or emotional symptoms caused by prolonged exposure to domestic violence. Like the legal model then, medical practice, through application of the medical model, subjugates the experiences and silences the voices of women, by dismissing the manifestations of their main experiences of domestic violence as unauthentic. (Fisher, 2000, p. 182)

The women's movement has largely been responsible for naming assault and other forms of oppression in the home as domestic violence and bringing it to the attention of policy makers, practitioners and researchers/academics (L. Kelly, 1988; L. Kelly et al., 1996; Pahl, 1985). Early response efforts were on protecting women and children from abuse by making it possible for them to escape the violence, in particular through the provision of women's refuges which could offer safety as well as other forms of support and encouragement to stay safe (Murray, 2002). Otter (1986) noted that when women were asked to rate services in terms of their usefulness, women's refuges rated as one of the most effective. More recently, Patton (2003) found that for 28% of the women in her Tasmanian study, a women's shelter had been a key pathway for her leaving (p. 50). Among the women I interviewed, Trish was the only victim/survivor to go to a refuge and her evaluation of the service was simple: *My main support was from the shelter. They were angels and I bless them to this day.*

Most of the victim/survivors in the study accessed a range of other formal service providers in their efforts to secure safety and support but, as with the police and medical responses, they found the usefulness varied. For example, when Geraldine escaped from her husband, she was taken to a safe house and received extensive support from the woman who lived there and a local minister of religion:

Geraldine: *They had a bible study group going there. And she said to me, do you know, you can stop this today. And I said, no, no, I've got this for the rest of my life. I can't. He's the father of my children and we're still married and I thought I wanted to go home and I was really pathetic with it all. And she said*

no, you can decide right at this moment to stop it. You can take control. She was full of new ideas for women and how we could actually pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off and do something about our lives. And she was just marvellous.

However, for Trish, the church was one of her greatest obstacles to securing safety and support. Her minister and other parishioners asked her to forgive her husband and urged her to return home. She had been aware all along that in leaving her husband, she would be leaving behind her close-knit religious and immigrant, cultural community.

Eileen had contact with psychologists and social workers as a consequence of her experiences with violence in her family. She found some of them judgemental and indifferent to what was happening for her. In our interview, she gave most of the credit for her emotional survival to a hospital social worker who supported her to separate from her husband, even though her husband was his 'client'. The social worker was reprimanded for his practice in supporting Eileen to separate and at the time of our interview, as far as Eileen knew, was still *having a break* from social work.

According to Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh and Winstok (2000), most services are provided to victim/survivors of domestic violence on the understanding that they either have separated from the perpetrator or they are trying to leave the relationship, but somehow are trapped within it. Few services are provided for women who choose to stay in a violent relationship in order to change it from within. As these authors note, it is controversial to suggest that some women might choose to stay in a relationship where there is violence, even when the constraints generally seen as mechanisms of entrapment (such as threats to injure or kill or specific social, cultural or practical barriers to leaving) are not present. However, they argue that as there is "data suggesting that many battered women are living with violence that is not life

threatening” (p. 12), there is a case for thinking about how to provide ‘empowering’ services for women who choose to stay in relationships where there is violence.⁵⁶

Peled et al. (2000) ignore perpetrator group counselling as an intervention which may bring about the cessation of violence without the need for the couple to separate even though these groups are widespread and there is some evidence that they can achieve change (Castelino & Compton, 2002; Keys Young, 1999). While the expressed intent of these groups is to hold men accountable for their violence, good practice principles for these groups provide for the partners of the men to be supported and empowered either to stay or leave the relationship (Pease & Fisher, 2001). In the study, Simon had attended voluntarily a group for perpetrators of domestic violence after he had injured his wife. In our interview, he explained how the counsellors had regular meetings with the partners of the men to keep them informed and check on their safety:⁵⁷

Simon: *It helped her a lot because ... I'd come home and say, oh you know I should have done this, and sorry I did this and I did it this way and I should have done it this way. Or, yeh we had a good night. Me and the boys talked about such and such. We tried this and we tried that. If she didn't know exactly what we were going on about – these morning or afternoon teas – she'd go down there and talk to them and see what we were actually going on about. It helped.*

Similarly, structures and processes such as reintegrative shaming, family adjudication, community or communitarian conferencing, mediation and sentencing circles have been considered as ways to protect and empower survivor/victims of domestic violence while simultaneously holding men accountable for their violence. These processes are usually associated with theories of restorative justice (Consedine, 1995), republican

⁵⁶ Peled et al. (2000) and Bowker (1993) have noted that some women use existing services to support their goal of changing the behaviour of their abusive partner rather than, necessarily, as a pathway to leaving. For example, some women contact the police in the hope that police intervention will act as a deterrent to their husband's abuse. Similarly, they use a refuge as respite or as warning to their partner that if the abuse continues, they will leave for good.

⁵⁷ In Simon and Joanne's case, the counsellors also encouraged and supported Joanne to have Simon's gun impounded by the police until she felt safe.

criminology (Braithwaite & Pettit, 1990) and Indigenous or First Nations peacemaking (Atkinson & Doyle, 1997; Coker, 1999); that is, systems informed by holistic notions of justice, many of which pre-date Enlightenment constructs of the individual. According to Stubbs (1997), community conferencing has been promoted:

as offering the potential for empowering victims, accountability to citizens, community dialogue, the creation of spaces for feminist voices to be raised against misogyny, the restoration of power imbalances, and the potential for nonexploitative masculinities to emerge. (p. 119)

However, this response to domestic violence, particularly where it is claimed to be supportive and helpful to women and children, has been critiqued by feminist victim advocates (Busch, 2002; Stubbs, 1997, 2004). These critics recognise the potential of restorative justice approaches to threaten women's safety and undermine their rights to autonomy (for example, the right to leave their abuser without feeling obligated to help him heal or make amends). Stubbs (2004) concludes her discussion on restorative justice and domestic violence by noting that:

We should avoid being bogged down in a polarised debate that privileges restorative justice over conventional criminal justice or the converse. The way forward ... may be in a hybrid approach that integrates those elements that offer a safe and effective outcome. (p. 18)

Informal responses towards victim/survivors

Little is known about the extent to which informal helpers provide practical support (for example, shelter, transport, money, child care) and emotional support to women experiencing or escaping from domestic violence, although there is evidence that it may be considerable. Like the phenomenon of domestic violence itself, its complexity and location within the private realm, means that the extent and effect of informal support to women and children living with violence is almost impossible to measure:

Characteristically women turn to informal sources of help before formal sources of help and seek solutions which enable them to stay in their own homes before accepting solutions which involve them in leaving home. (Pahl, cited in Borkowski et al., 1983, p. 185)

More recently, L. Kelly (1996), Lempert (1997), Holder (1998), Goff (2001) and Wilcox (2000), have suggested that although there is a popular myth that families and friends will not intervene in cases of domestic violence, there is strong evidence to the contrary. For example, Paquin's (1994) study of neighbour reactions to domestic violence found that one in 20 respondents had provided shelter to victims of domestic abuse. Similarly, women interviewed by L. Hoff (1990) on the effectiveness of natural (that is, family and friendship) networks often found their families supportive following the separation from a violent partner, and she concluded that "the women's relationships with family members are generally less negative than is popularly supposed" (p. 85). L. Hoff also found that the quantity of support provided by natural networks far exceeded that offered by formal networks of agency personnel such as police and social workers. *Against the Odds*, a research report by consultants Keys Young (1998), summarised the experiences of women who had sought assistance from family and friends. Participants in the Keys Young study "reported receiving very different responses, ranging from condemnation and disbelief, to well-meaning but misguided attempts to help, to real practical and emotional support and assistance" (p.41).⁵⁸

All of the women I interviewed who had lived with violence, had requested informal support at some time to secure safety and support either prior to leaving the relationship, to facilitate leaving or after the separation. As with formal service provision, the response from informal supporters or witnesses was mixed and varied in its extent and effectiveness. For some of the women, some of the time, the response was helpful and supportive. For others and/or at other times, the response was indifferent or damaging. For example, Bella, Trish and Carmel experienced unhelpful responses from family, at least when they sought help initially, because they were violating a religious taboo against separation and divorce:

Bella: *My religion, and in my family, if you get divorced or separated, you are an outcast. Because even my sister... she told me you have to stick with him whatever happens, in sickness or in health, or for poorer.*

⁵⁸ These findings resonate with those by Lempert (1997) who found that while women turned first to informal supporters, they did not necessarily get the kind of assistance they wanted.

Trish: *When I was looking for an answer about the violence in my marriage, I confided in my father. It was difficult for my parents too. My leaving was a first for them in our family. Dad wanted me to try and find a way to make the marriage work. Since then though, they have been very supportive of me.*

Carmel: *There had to be a lesson for the rest [of the family]. My father came down harder on me to show the others [that you couldn't leave].*

Geraldine, whose father had been physically and sexually abusive towards her, never expected support from her family and she and Hannah experienced active collusion between their husbands and his parents who condoned the abuse.⁵⁹ Members of informal networks seemed more able to be helpful if there was a direct appeal for help by the victim or once the couple had separated and the issue was *out in the open*. Barbara, Bella and Eileen had positive experiences of informal responding once it was obvious that the abuse was happening and they made a direct appeal for help:

Barbara: *[One night] he just went absolutely psycho and ... I went up two neighbours up – the kids and I hid in their garage. And she came outside ... and I told her so she took the kids inside and hid them and he came up to her place and said have you seen Barbara and she said no and then about two o'clock in the morning I said I have to go back because he should be asleep by now and she came with me ...*

Bella: *I was not going to tell [my supervisor at work] but I sometimes I have to have a day off. He asked me what's wrong Bella, there's something and I just have to tell him. My supervisor says to me Bella you need to see a solicitor and you get all your forms like certificate, marriage certificate and get a restraining order.*

Eileen: *The ones that do support, like the ones like the family and friends, are very good support. To be honest, with our experiences with professional counselling, they're definitely the ones who help.*

⁵⁹ Coker (1999) found in her research with Navajo peacemakers that "parents in particular are prone to cover for their son and blame his partner" (p. 44). The report by Keys Young (1998) also noted that collusion by the perpetrator's family is particularly damaging.

Despite occasionally having a positive experience with neighbours, most of the women in the study who had lived with abusive partners commented that neighbours generally didn't seem to *want to know* what was going on. None of them had a neighbour spontaneously offer help, even though the abuse must have been obvious from the shouting and screaming:

Bella: *Even my next-door neighbour – they knew because he was so noisy – he has loud mouth. He called me everything, bad things, about me and [my daughter]. [But] they never asked me [how I was going]. I think my neighbour – they don't really try to contact or anything.*

Barbara: *[It's] like death – no-one knows what to say. Afraid to say the wrong thing. It's not a community problem. People don't see it like that.*

The picture about informal responding which emerged from the stories of the witnesses to violence, was similar to that of victim/survivors; that is, informal responding takes many forms and is varied in terms of its intent and effectiveness. With the exception of Sally, those who had witnessed violence as extended family, friends, bystanders or neighbours, responded primarily with the intention of helping the victim/survivor.⁶⁰ They all found it easier to respond when there was a direct appeal for help. Prior to a direct appeal, most of the participants who were neighbours to people experiencing violence, struggled to know if what they were hearing really was abuse and whether or not their offers of help would be welcomed or rebuffed:

Stewart: *So, we could hear the noise coming but I was unwilling to put an interpretation without something more factual than just my interpretation. It [was her coming to see us that] opened the door for us to act. We accepted it so, we more or less had to [act] when we thought it was appropriate.*

⁶⁰ Sally initially responded to the violence next door by trying to have her neighbour Tracey evicted. However, she also called the police on a number of occasions, and had the police responded differently, her intervention may have been effective for Tracey. Denise and her partner Kevin initially responded to the violence they witnessed next door by contacting the police because they were concerned about the woman's safety. However, they eventually determined that what was happening was a form of mutual emotional and verbal abuse (what Johnson and Campbell, 1993, have referred to as 'male controlled interactive violence') and their responses eventually focused on restoring the amenity of their neighbourhood (for example, asking the neighbours to close the window when they were shouting at one another, to swear less) rather than on trying to find ways to offer the woman protection or support.

For Denise and Kevin, part of their struggle about offering to help was the possibility that any involvement would *take over our lives*:

Denise: *I saw her one day at the shops. I tried really hard to make eye contact with her because I wanted to say something, to tell her about the refuge, but she wouldn't look at me. I didn't feel good about not approaching her. But part of me felt like we were involved enough already. It [the fighting] was already having a big impact on us and we were finding it really difficult to live with. I was fearful that if we got more involved it would take over our lives.*

Goff (2001), who undertook an extensive action research project with formal service providers and 'personal supporters' who respond informally where there is domestic violence, describes the impact of their intervention:

Fundamentally, effective personal supporters take the load from the shoulders of those suffering the impacts of violence and abuse, build bridges with agencies where agencies are prepared to work with them and operationalise risk-minimising activities outside of agency influence. (p. 3)

These outcomes of informal support resonate with those which emerged from the study narratives. For example, extracts from my second interview with Lorraine illustrate how informal personal support can work at the day-to-day level. Lorraine had contacted the police on several occasions before our interview, whenever she had heard evidence of violence next door:

Lorraine: *I can hear the abuse. It sounded more like shouting. In terms of her physical safety it didn't sound like she was any more vulnerable than other times. She manages this violence and abuse in an incredibly complex way. When I got back in the house, it had been going on for more than an hour, so I phoned the police. But this time, I didn't phone the police response number. I phoned the [specialist] dv unit and said to them, I'm concerned at what I can hear. I have previously called the police. Is there any other strategy I can use? The response from them was, no, the usual number, and they will respond quickly. I said I hear what you're saying, at certain times of the day it is harder to respond. No, no that is what you have to do, [they say]. So I phoned the number and I was told they were extremely busy. However, they were... . They've got smarter or it was genuine. I went about it differently. I wasn't concerned for her immediate safety so I thought I'd try some dialogue on them. I was concerned about what I was hearing, to be concerned she may be being hit. I gave them very specific details. And the guy I was talking to said, you've done this before. I said, this is ongoing violence and abuse. It has been going on for years. I said, I only ring when... this is something unusual. They said they would attend and took my contact details. And about – I can't remember –*

about half an hour later, 20 minutes, they hadn't arrived. But they rang me. I didn't get the sense they were fobbing me off. What they said was a number of our crews have been called away to a major – what he said was they're chasing a big bunch of baddies, at one level. It's interesting, he rang me back – this time he gave me a name, a contact number and a job number. He said, we're really stretched for resources, but he said if it's not okay, ring me back and give these details. We'll put it on hold for now. Now that must have been... he must have rung me back more than an hour after I'd rung him. Less than 10 minutes after I put the phone down, it was really, really loud. I didn't have to go outside. I rang back, spoke to a different officer, gave him the details, said I'd just spoken to someone. He said, yes, I've seen those details. They did attend. It took about half an hour. But I wasn't saying get here now. And they were there for quite some time.

The other bit I have told you only briefly, is that I did make contact with Tamara. This would have been two or three week ago. I mentioned previously that I'd tried a whole range of strategies to try and make contact with her without that happening. On this particular day she was walking up the footpath and I was out the front and I physically stood in front of her. And just blurted out that I was, at times I was really concerned for her safety and I wanted her to know that. And if there was anything I could do to support her, let me know. If she wanted my phone number, I was happy for her to have it. So that was the icebreaker.

Marilyn: *That's amazing.*

Lorraine: *Well it wasn't going to happen any other way. Hello wasn't going to do it. How are you wasn't going to do it. So I had the conversation on the footpath. She had got him out of the house. ... So, in the conversation on the footpath, I asked her, I said do you want... She became tearful. I said, do you want to sit down? Are you okay? She said, I've got to get back. I said, that's fine. I'm home most mornings. If you want a chat, let me know. If you want a number, let me know.*

Four or five days later she left a note in my letterbox saying just how much she appreciated the contact, that she would like to have a chat at some stage in the near future, that just at the moment she was just enjoying the quiet. So Wednesday night ... she rang me, said she was ringing from a phone box. That she was staying somewhere else for a few days. She'd left his bag outside the front with some things in it and she was unsure how he was going to react so she was staying away for a few days. So she asked if I would mind keeping an eye on what was happening next door when he picked the bag up. Her concern was that he might have trashed her place.

In the first part of our interview, there is evidence that Lorraine has started to 'build bridges with agencies' (in this case the police) in order to support her neighbour Tamara. In the second part of the transcript, Lorraine has begun to 'operationalise risk-minimising activities' by offering Tamara her phone number. Finally, Lorraine talks

about *keeping an eye out* while Tamara is away, the sort of activity which acts to 'take [some of] the load' from Tamara.

Responding from within the couple

The women in the study who had lived with violence, spoke about a range of responses which they initiated to secure their safety and support. Many of them sought out formal and informal support. One of the themes which emerged from their narratives, was the role of epiphanies in determining if, when and how a woman might take a certain action such as leave (or plan to leave) the perpetrator.⁶¹ For example, Geraldine experienced an epiphany when the violence and threats escalated and she realised that her unborn child probably would die with her if she stayed in the relationship. Another theme which emerged in relation to victim/survivor responses, was around resilience. For most of the women, by the time the violent relationship ended, it was evident that they had developed expertise to cope with the violence and had established patterns of resistance.⁶² One aspect of resistance for women living with violence can be 'talking back' or 'talking smart' (hooks, 1990; Taylor, 1998a). Helen used talking back as a strategy in response to the abuse she experienced:

Helen: *So after that I used to always, if he ever started to get nasty with me, I used to stand there and look him straight in the eye and say listen here you fat prick. There's a saying: the bigger you are the harder you friggin' fall. I said, don't ever hit me and turn your back 'cause I said the first thing that comes to my mitt, I will let rip. Okay? And when I get really angry and acquire a temper I am not responsible for what I do.*

For the 10 years that I was with him we used to cut and cart firewood ... and sometimes he would get so aggressive that I used to threaten him with the axe and say to him, you know, you prick, just keep your mouth shut or one day you'll put your head down and I'm gonna slice it ... straight down the middle. He used to get me so angry that I used to cry.

⁶¹ Epiphanies, also referred to as *ah ha* moments, triggers or turning points, are experiences after which we never see things in the same light again (Denzin, 1989; Eisikovits, Buchbinder, & Mor, 1998). How we understand their role, in order to improve responses to domestic violence, is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁶² Bar On (1993) has defined resistance as "practices that respond to oppression and show that the socially marginalized subjects are not powerless, that they can set limits on or subvert the oppressive forces, and that they can be creative and go beyond the boundaries set for them by their oppression" (p. 93).

The narratives of Geraldine, Eileen and Barbara illustrate how they became resilient and adept at managing the abuse they were experiencing:

Geraldine: *I started to fight back then. Not physically fight back, but mentally. There were times when he wasn't around and I was licking my wounds and hiding under the house and things I would start to think about, okay, what can I do to minimise this happening again? What does he do that leads me to know that violence is going to follow? And then how can I get away from that point?*

Eileen: *But I knew I was safe as long as I didn't go. Like, I wasn't passive. I knew that so long as I didn't leave him I was okay. That the kids were okay. But there were times that I knew not to push him. And I did know not to push him. I knew I could get to this certain point and I sort of knew when to stop. 'Cause the odd times I went past the point and it'd get very hairy...*

Barbara: *My kids were so conditioned... They had their own rooms but I would just say to them we have to go and they would come out of a dead sleep, the feet would hit the floor into their slippers, grab their dressing gown and we would all meet at the front door.*

Bowker (1993) suggested that women's actions, which normally would be interpreted as signs of passivity and helplessness (such as attempting to run away or to hide from the abuser), can be interpreted as intelligent decision-making and acts of resistance. He reported on a study where he hypothesised that "battered women were not nearly as passive as they had been portrayed in the literature" (p. 155). He found that women often actively resisted the abuse, even when their strategies (particularly the use of what he referred to as 'counterviolence') were not effective or resulted in an escalation of the violence. Eileen thought that her efforts to resist the abuse probably made the violence worse but were necessary for her to maintain her sense of self:

Eileen: *When I look back, I think that's why it got like it did. Because I was like I was, and I would fight him, in ways. And I did fight him in ways. Don't get me wrong. I was never passive. I was never ever passive. I used to do things. Like he'd be down the pub and he got to learn that I'd ring him up and say tea's on the table in 10 minutes and if he wasn't home, the dog literally got his tea. Plate and all.*

Barbara had felt compelled to stay with her partner because of his threats to kill the children if she left and because she did not want to admit to her parents that her second marriage was *a failure*. During our interview, she described incidents where she saw herself as standing up to her husband and resisting his abuse:

Barbara: *You were going to get beaten up anyway. So, you know I got gamer and gamer. And you get a sixth sense – like my ex would go to work and you just knew that was the day he was going to go straight to the pub and he wouldn't get home until after the pub had shut and he couldn't drink with anyone and he'd come home and you used to take the chance if there were a couple of bottles of beer in the fridge you'd take the chance and empty them out. And he'd say I had beer in there and you'd say no, remember you drank them up. I fucking did not. And you'd stand there telling him a barefaced lie. You know you bloody tipped them out.*

Bella's resistance to the abuse was in the form of self-talk, where she would analyse what was happening to her and recognise the injustice, particularly in the context of living as an immigrant in a so-called *developed country*:

Bella: *Sometimes my child is sleeping in the dog's kennel because I'm not allowed to get in there, in the house, and before I go to work I have to change my clothes in the car and sleep in the car. But I think I should not do this. We are in Australia. We are not supposed to do this. We are in a developed country. Why do I have to do this?*

In this study, I have foregrounded victim/survivor responses which demonstrate the strength, resilience and agency of the women who lived with violence (Crinall, 1999; Fine et al., 2000). In support of this approach, L. Kelly et al. (1996) have noted that “both resistance and coping ... become marginal areas of knowledge and experience if we rely on simplistic models of victimization and its consequences” (p. 90). If we dispense with the idea of a fixed, unitary subjectivity, we are permitted to see how responding to domestic violence out of a position of courage and strength does not preclude responses which emanate from terror, shame, grief, defeat and self-blame. Helen, for example, described how she often contemplated suicide while Barbara blamed herself for the violence, as many women do (Bryson, 1994; K. Healy, 2000):

Barbara: *I remember we were having an argument and I thought maybe I was nagging too much, you know, just ... Maybe it was my fault.*

Helen: *I got so stressed I couldn't think straight anymore. I used to sit at home and have a smoke and a coffee [and think about doing myself in]. It would be like big red lights going across... and I used to sit there and think I'll just... I can do it... but every time I come to do it... I had tablets there ... and I thought one of these days I'm going to bloody do it... I don't want to live like this anymore.*

For most of the survivor/victims in the study, their response to the violence was determined by the source and extent of their fears; that is, fear of their own or others' injury or death and fear of other forms of loss. For example, Geraldine was terrified of her husband's violence but she also was immobilised by the fear of losing her identity as a loyal wife:

Geraldine: *Only once [before], I'd rung up [the police] when he'd actually given me a head injury and I spoke to them then and they urged me to have him charged. And I was too afraid and they said we can't stop this unless you let us stop it. I couldn't. I just couldn't. Because it felt to me like I was betraying our relationship. So I couldn't do it.*

There is little mention in the academic literature of abusive men responding to their own violence in order to ensure the protection or safety of their partners. Rather, according to Peled et al. (2000):

The available knowledge about batterers suggests that they tend to blame the victim for the violence and expect her to initiate reconciliation and take primary responsibility for the family's integrity (for example, Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1997). Overall, it seems that battering men perceive the violence as a family problem rather than an individual one, if they are willing to recognize that there is a problem at all. They also believe that the woman should remain with them despite the violence and are willing to go a long way to achieve this end. (p. 18)

Simon's narrative about his response to his violent behaviour challenges this 'available knowledge' to some extent. He responded to his violence by voluntarily attending a treatment group for perpetrators and saw the facilitators' focus on his partner's safety as appropriate.

Accountability, treatment and support for perpetrators

Formal agency responses towards perpetrators

A focus on holding men accountable for their violence against intimate partners has been a more recent aspect of formal intervention where there is domestic violence. Although there never has been anything in the criminal justice legislation in Australia to prevent physical assault in the home from being regarded as a criminal offence, police failure to charge and then if charges are laid, judicial unwillingness to prosecute and punish have always been (and continue to be) major barriers to the enactment of formal mechanisms to hold men accountable for domestic violence. As Murray (2002) notes with reference to the middle decades of the last century:

Considering the level of cruelty experienced by women, it is surprising that the Criminal Code was not used more frequently, but this was more to do with the police's unwillingness to intervene in 'private' matters than with the severity of the crimes. (p. 95)

There is ongoing concern that some police still do not respond appropriately to domestic violence (Dave, 2000; Katzen & Kelly, 2000; O'Donnell, 2003; Patton, 2003). As Murray (2002) further notes:

In 2002, policing continues to be an issue of concern, despite the supportive position of the Police Commissioner ... that 'police must treat domestic violence as a crime and aggressively prosecute offenders'. (p. 176)

For about 10 years from the mid-1980s in Australia, there was considerable interest in an integrated, inter-agency or *co-ordinated community* approach to domestic violence intervention (often referred to as the Duluth, Minnesota or Hamilton model). Central to this model was a commitment to a criminal justice response to hold men accountable for their violence through pro-arrest policies and practices, support for victim/survivors of abuse, and mandated treatment programs for perpetrators, usually group based. Describing the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Shepard (1991) explained how the project "was designed to reduce cultural supports for battering by shifting the responsibility for holding batterers accountable for their behavior from victims to social institutions" (p. 87).

With this model (piloted during the early 1990s in Western Australia), police are expected to arrest perpetrators if they have reasonable grounds to believe an assault has occurred. When this happens, the police liaise with a women's support service (often a women's refuge) to provide advocacy and support for the victim/survivor, charge the perpetrator with assault and obtain a restraining order if appropriate. Under local protocols, the perpetrator is convicted if there is sufficient evidence and mandated to attend a perpetrator group counselling program. The group facilitators liaise with the women's service (or the woman directly) to monitor the perpetrator's behaviour towards his partner or ex-partner and an inter-agency committee monitors the whole system to ensure that agencies are acting in accordance with the protocols. Initial evidence from the original Duluth project supported a pro-arrest policy with research concluding that "arresting the offender was the most effective means of reducing the likelihood of new violence" (Berk, 1993, p. 323).

However, subsequent studies have not supported the claim by Berk that arrest acts as an effective deterrent to abuse in all cases (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1993). Other concerns have been raised about the model, specifically the cost of its implementation, doubts about the effectiveness of perpetrator programs and the threat of over zealous policing, particularly of minority groups (James, 1995). There also have been critiques of the model based on ideology. For example, removing the right of the victim/survivor to decide whether or not the perpetrator is charged, can be interpreted as a breach of her right to self-determination. In addition, James has suggested that pro-arrest policies and mandatory group counselling may increase domestic violence, acting as 'systemic level' legitimization for the men's own dysfunctional use of power and control tactics (p. 51). Like James (1995), Edleson (1996) suggests that the state may be using 'poor modeling' when it uses the coercive power of the judiciary to mandate men into counselling (p. 166). Holder (1998) has described the dilemma from a feminist perspective:

As feminists we have upheld the critique of the state as at best clumsy and at worst oppressive and discriminatory in the lives of women and children. Especially within indigenous and other marginalised communities. Yet we continue to invest our primary energies and resources for protecting women and holding abusers accountable into that most conservative set of institutions – the criminal justice system. (p. 5)

Despite the limitations of the criminal justice system seeking to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence, a Keys Young (1999) report *Ending domestic violence? Programs for perpetrators* has recommended that:

The strongest level of response would be the development of an integrated community based intervention program based in the criminal justice system and incorporating the courts, prosecutors, police, corrections, victims' support and advocacy services, with mandatory participation in men's group education programs supported by strong sanctions and increasing penalties for further abuse. (p. 207)

In a more recent study, Keys Young (2000) recommend strengthening the ACT Inter-agency Family Violence Intervention Program which is based broadly on the Duluth model, despite their evaluation of the program showing some significant problems. The problems were consistent with those they had identified in other evaluations of similar programs and included: reluctance by the police to arrest (despite evidence and protocols); low rates of sentencing to the Perpetrator Education Program; low rates of attendance for those referred and minimal consequences for non-attendance; and inadequate assistance for victim/survivors and court witnesses.

In the early 1990s in Western Australia, there was an expectation the Duluth model would be 'rolled out' across the state, beginning with a pilot project in Armadale, an outer metropolitan suburb of Perth (Murray, 2002, p. 171). However, the politics surrounding the implementation of the Duluth model were complex. At the level of policy formation, the model was much talked about but never implemented beyond the pilot. In 1993 in Western Australia, there was a change of government and the conservative Liberal-National coalition put on hold some of the policy ideas for addressing domestic violence which had been developing under the Labor state government over the previous decade. Realistically, there was never much hope that the Duluth model in its original form would become government policy. For all its faults (practical and ideological), the model had the potential to challenge seriously men's right to act with impunity in their own homes and moreover (and perhaps more significantly), it held the police service accountable to a community committee rather

than simply to its own internal hierarchy and masculinist culture. Such an approach would undermine the ability of the police service to act as a state-sponsored supporter of patriarchy in the way radical feminist theorising has suggested that it does (Maguire, 1988; Dobash and Dobash in McMaster & Swain, 1989). By 1996, when the Liberal-National coalition state government produced its Family and Domestic Violence Action Plan, talk of the Duluth model had come and gone. The action plan established regional committees in the 17 police regions across the state, which under the guise of 'co-ordination and integration' provided a simulacrum of Duluth but without any of the significant power shifts the model had promised. The flagship of the new conservative state government's response was the *Freedom from Fear Campaign Against Domestic Violence*, launched in 1998, which aimed to encourage and support men into counselling rather than focus on the criminal nature of their violence. In 2001, the less conservative Labor Party was elected to govern in Western Australia. The government initially considered abandoning the *Freedom from Fear* campaign but lobbying by service providers for it to continue was successful. However, the Labor Government re-focused on a criminal justice response to domestic violence and in 2004, introduced legislation aimed at strengthening police powers to respond (for example, *on-the-spot* issuing of restraining orders), but without any reference to community-based monitoring of their protocols and practices.

Other formal strategies for holding men accountable for their violence sit within the broad framework of restorative justice. Wright (1991) defines restorative justice as "not a new form of punishment, rehabilitation, or reducing pressure on the system, but a different principle, repairing (as far as possible) or making up for the damage and hurt caused by the crime" (p. 41). With restorative justice, the need for atonement between the victim and offender is dealt with alongside the need for punishment of the offender by the state.

Restorative justice processes have some support within the Indigenous community in Australia and among First Nations people elsewhere because they can be seen as culturally appropriate and more closely aligned to the principles of customary law (Coker, 1999; Zellerer, 1999). According to Zellerer:

For Native peoples, reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration of harmony are important components of their culture for addressing conflict. The criminal justice system, on the other hand, operates on an adversarial model. While the adversarial justice system focuses on stigmatizing offenders and excluding them from the community, Native peoples take a conciliatory approach that attempts to reintegrate offenders. Rather than focusing on punishment, Native responses focus on healing. (1999, p. 353)

However, pro-feminist groups (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) have expressed concern about these processes, viewing them as soft options for dealing with violence and a threat to women's safety and wellbeing (Stubbs, 1997, 2004). Like mediation (and some court proceedings), these processes can become sites for ongoing harassment and abuse of women victim/survivors, with perpetrators appearing contrite and conciliatory in order to maintain contact with their partner. According to Zellerer (1999), in order for community-based justice programs to be successful, they "must include women at all stages of development and implementation" in order to avoid collusion between the program and the inevitable patriarchal dominance within the community which has sponsored the process (p. 350).

Outside the criminal justice system, there are other responses to domestic violence which focus on the treatment of men who use violence against known women. Some Indigenous communities promote 'healing houses' or 'cooling off houses' (Sherwood, 1996) which allow the victim/survivor of abuse to stay in her own home while her partner lives elsewhere and receives culturally appropriate counselling and support. In Western Australia, *Breathing Space* (Communicare, n.d.) is a residential therapeutic community which offers life skills and interpersonal skills training to men (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who use violence. Other services, such as *The SHED Project* (Laming, 2000) and *MATES* (Men's Support Group Busselton., n.d.) provide similar support and skills training in a non-residential setting.

Men who use violence can access, voluntarily, individual counselling and groups through more mainstream marriage and family counselling agencies. This has been facilitated in Western Australia through the *Freedom from Fear* campaign which targets violent and potentially violent men through advertisements depicting male violence in

the home and offering men a 24-hour helpline which will give them advice about anger management and referral to free group programs and professional counselling services. Simon explained how the process worked for him:

Simon: *I decided there and then I needed help. And I didn't know where to go. So Joanne rang somebody, I think it might have been the helpline I think and then they ... I think they contacted [the counselling agency] and then [the counsellor] phoned here. So I went and saw her and got into the group.*

Informal responses towards perpetrators

In Australia, informal responses which hold men accountable for their violence, or which offer treatment or support, are rarely documented. Rituals of public shaming to hold men accountable are not a part of the Australian culture. However, public shaming rituals have been used in the past (K. Wilson, 1997) and continue to be used and developed in some countries. For example, in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh in India, women's groups have organised to publicly shame villages which do not adequately protect women from dowry violence (Mitra cited in Mercy, Krug, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2003). Similarly, in parts of Tanzania and Nigeria, village women will make up 'scurrilous' songs about a man who is known to use violence against his wife (Kidder & Fine, 1986). The song will be chanted around the village in order to shame him into changing his behaviour (personal communication, G. Mongella, August 7, 1996). Some of the study participants considered shaming as a strategy to challenge male violence, although they rarely acted on it. For example, Denise described how she and her partner Kevin discussed this kind of response:

Denise: *Kevin considered taping it [the shouting and swearing] and playing it back to them at full volume. We spent a lot of time and energy working out what to do. Kevin thought about putting up a sign out the front of their house that said 'domestic violence perpetrator lives here'.*

In the study, Carmel described how domestic violence was managed within her traditional Italian immigrant community, through a structured but informal confrontation of the perpetrator. Here, the emphasis was on encouraging the man to change his behaviour rather than offering explicit protection and support to the victim/survivor. Carmel explained how the woman who was being victimised was

expected to tell her mother who then would discuss it with the matriarch of the offender's family. She would pass on the *complaint* to the patriarch of the offender's family who then would confront the perpetrator. Leaving the marriage was not an option for the woman and this system was expected to be used. Carmel explained how the woman's father was kept out of the process to prevent the possibility of him using physical violence towards the perpetrator which was not seen to be in the community's interest. In relation to a similar communitarian strategy in Mexico which sought to involve family and friends, Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Espejel and Pick (1999) have noted that:

Intervention by men was perceived as likely to end in a fight, because men confront violence with violence. However, participants did describe cases in which intervention by a male family member was perceived as producing a positive change in the male partner, at least in the short term. (p. 45)

Among the study participants, Helen noted that she would have liked her brother to intervene and challenge her partner about his violence although she was not asking her brother to physically assault him. Similarly, Barbara recounted how a friend had challenged her husband, and even though it didn't stop the violence, she valued the intervention:

Helen: *I told my brother about fat boy. I said he virtually... he rapes me, he treats me like shit. And Laurie said, you know, he just looked at me and he said well, you know why do you stay there? And I said well to be quite honest with you I said I don't really bloody know. But that's all he ever said. I would have appreciated it if he would've said, well one day when he comes down home, I'll sit him down and have a talk to him. Because to me that would've been my brother looking out for me. But in other words, he just said well why do you stay there? It's like you're an idiot, you know, you're mad. Which, you know, I was. I admit that. But, I mean... it would've been nice...*

Barbara: *And he spat it at the golf club one night about something. Think I'd spoken to one of his other mates and I shouldn't have ... so when we got home he stormed out the back and his mate said to me what's his problem? and I said I thought you would have worked it out by now. And he said are you worried? and I said I'm always worried. And he said well I'll go and sort him out and I mean this guy is a big guy and he went out and he fairly ripped into him. He said ... Barbara is one of the best women and ... if you keep going you're going to lose her. And even Tom was a bit worried about him.*

In the study, there was some reference to informal support for men who used violence. As with other forms of responding, there were mixed outcomes. For some of the women, their partners' friends and family actively colluded with the violence, threatening the women's long-term safety and wellbeing. Michael's experience of informal support from his friends was positive for him although it is not possible to know how Lucy may have interpreted that support or even if she knew about it:

Michael: *No one said that [the violence] was okay. No one said it was okay but they were lovely. They, they could see that I was really repentant. They could see I was just demolished and they could also see that in spite of that... [On the] occasions on which I had hit Lucy I was fundamentally a good person and that I wasn't a beast or ... anything like that and I'm not. And they were helping.*

The absence of helpful, informal support to perpetrators of domestic violence becomes most obvious when the violence culminates in homicide and/or suicide. Approximately half of all female homicides in Australia are the result of spousal disputes (Ferrante et al., 1996; Mouzos, 1999) and Strang (1996) has noted that between 1989 and 1993 in Australia, more than a third of child homicides were perpetrated by the current or former partner of the child's mother. In our interview, Janet's narrative focused on the weeks and days leading up to the murder/suicide of her grandchildren and son-in-law. Her son-in-law had been granted interim custody of his children after Janet's daughter Kym had left him. There had been a history of abusive behaviour towards the children prior to the separation and towards Kym following the separation. Janet described the involvement of a neighbour, the police and a close friend with her son-in-law Frank in the days before he absconded with the children:

Janet: *Then on the Wednesday afternoon, her neighbour phoned ... and she said Kym, she said I don't know what's going on but Frank's in the house, the house is in total darkness, all the blinds are drawn and she said there's silence. She said I'm very worried. Kym rang the lawyer and the lawyer said you ring the police and get the police out there straight away. She said I'm getting onto the magistrate to try and change those orders so the police could pick those children up. Two police went out there – a male cop and a female. Now this is another thing that makes Kym and me angry; very, very angry. He walked in, he got in the house. Frank was curled on the floor, huddled, crying on the floor. The house was an absolute mess.*

On that Monday he rang his best mate ... gave him the TV, the video, the Nintendo, all the games. Frank said take them to the Cash Converters he said and send the money to my mother. Well if this bloke's going to do a runner with or without his kids isn't he going to need money? Greg never even picked up on it. Why didn't he pick up on that? He was his best mate.

There are a number of points in this story where intensive, appropriate informal (or formal) support for Frank may have prevented the deaths. In December 2003, in the aftermath of a spate of domestic homicides in Western Australia, the Women's Refuge Group spoke publicly about the limited ability of formal services to protect women and their children following an acrimonious separation. They called on men to take charge and intervene when their friends were at risk of breaching restraining orders or committing serious, violent offences.

Responding from within the couple

Although it is acknowledged rarely in the literature, it appeared from the narratives of the study participants, that much of the effort to hold men accountable for their violence and/or to offer them support to seek treatment is undertaken by their female partners. Most of women in the study who experienced violence had challenged the violence and urged their partners to get help. For example, it was Simon's partner Joanne who rang the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline and arranged for a counsellor to contact Simon. Eventually for Barbara and Helen, challenging their partners about the violence resulted in their partners leaving. Both women described how they arrived at an 'I'm not going to take this anymore' decision and in response to this, their partners offered to leave provided the women found them somewhere else to live.

From among the study participants, there was little evidence that perpetrators took on the responsibility of holding themselves accountable for their violence or seeking treatment or support, although Simon followed through with the referral Joanne arranged for him. Michael acted to obtain support for himself when Lucy left him but at the time that he was acting violently, from his account, he seems to have been unable to respond, beyond an overwhelming sense of shame and regret:

Michael: *It's very painful and it's very hurtful and it's very embarrassing to recall that I was violent in the relationship with Lucy. And I do want to say that I never consciously used violence. Because some of that sort of happened in a flash. And whenever it happened it was instantly, instantly, instantly regretted.*

Community education and awareness

Over the past two decades, since domestic violence has been on the policy agenda in Australia (Murray, 2002; Weeks, 2000; Weeks & Gilmore, 1996), there have been community education programs (many structured as *campaigns*), to raise awareness of the problem of domestic violence. In 1988, the Office of the Status of Women commissioned background research to support the development of a campaign against domestic violence. This research found that a significant proportion of the population considered domestic violence to be a private matter and tolerable in some circumstances (Elliott & Shanahan Research, 1988). Since then, campaigns have been run to encourage people to recognise domestic violence as more than physical assault, to recognise assault in the home as criminal, and to provide information about domestic violence services.

In Western Australia, the *Freedom from Fear* campaign has targeted men to encourage them to take responsibility for their violence by constructing domestic violence primarily as a breach of their parental responsibility. The campaign materials were developed from research results which showed that men would be motivated to change if they thought their behaviour was having a negative impact on their children. The issue of children as witnesses to domestic violence became the focus of the campaign (Donovan, Paterson & Francas, cited in Murray, 2002).^H

The logic of this kind of research escapes me. If we want to engage in macro level social change processes to eliminate domestic violence (O'Neill, 1998; Pease & Fisher, 2001) what is the point of researching the 'man in the street' in order to find out what he thinks and then feed his values and attitudes back to him as part of a change process? In the FFF case, the fact that men worry about the impact of violence on their children but not on their partner, surely is illustrative of the dysfunctional patriarchal culture which underpins domestic violence in the first place. Advertisements which buy into men's concerns about damaging their property/progeny without an alternative discourse being presented (like reminding them that what they are doing is ugly and illegal) are hardly likely to be useful in achieving macro level structural change.

Subsequently, television, newspaper and radio advertisements, depicting a man hitting or seriously threatening his female partner in the presence of children, became central to the campaign encouraging men to seek help.⁶³

Campaigns to alert lay helpers about how they informally might intervene in relationships where there is domestic violence are becoming more common. For example, the Domestic Violence and Incest Recourse Centre in collaboration with the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, has produced a booklet entitled *Is someone you know being abused in a relationship? A guide for families, friends and neighbours*. This booklet describes the various forms of domestic abuse, deals with some of the myths which blame the victim and outlines practical strategies for lay helpers, including a section on what not to do.

Running parallel to community education programs on domestic violence has been a growing community awareness about peace and non-violence issues in general. During the latter stages of the Cold War, there was considerable community interest in non-violent forms of conflict resolution. Organisations such as the Quakers and Movement for a New Society used an ecological model to link global violence and the threat of nuclear war with forms of interpersonal domination and violence. This resulted in workshops and workbooks which illustrated processes for non-violent direct action and strategies for working co-operatively and non-violently in families, organisations and communities (for example, Coover, Deacon, Esser, & Moore, 1977). As the perceived threat of nuclear war diminished, so too did much of the community education on peace and non-violent conflict resolution. However, many of the strategies and skills developed during the 1970s and 1980s have remained and manifest themselves now in

⁶³ Feminist service providers expressed concern about the advertisements because they did not censure the violence directly. In addition, women's services reported an increase in the number of women seeking help when the advertisements were running. By alerting them to the risks to children from witnessing violence, the advertisements had an unintended consequence of encouraging some women to leave violent relationships (Personal communication, L. Phillips, March 19, 2002; Murray, 2002).

various forms, such as community-based alternative dispute-resolution processes and no-bullying campaigns in schools and workplaces.⁶⁴ Writers such as Schmidt (1995) and Bishop (2002) make the link between non-violence theorising and strategies for responding to violence against women in the home. At the global level, there has been a renewed interest in non-violent direct action by peace and anti-globalisation networks. Anti-oppressive organisational structures have been reactivated to organise against the *global war on terror* and the expansion of Western capitalism through globalisation (N. Klein, 2003; Peavey, 2000; Starhawk, 2002).

The linking of domestic violence (and all forms of violence against women) with other forms of violence in our society is a theoretical and practical working out of a feminist ecological model for understanding domestic violence. This ecological view of interconnected violence links violence against women with the violence used to sustain oppression such as poverty (class oppression), invasion and colonisation (racial and ethnic oppression) and environmental devastation (species, class and racial oppression). Community education from this perspective focuses on the promotion of 'non-violence, harmony and safety' as well as education about specific aspects of violence such as domestic violence (Weeks, 2000, p. 282). Thus, Edleson (1996) has tempered his support for perpetrator treatment programs by arguing for the need for wider social change at a macro level to counter the prevailing culture which underpins male violence:

The winner-take-all mentality and a lack of empathy for those with less power seem to be resurgent themes in the public life of America and other countries at mid-decade. What is needed ... is a major social movement in which men take responsibility for their abuse of power – both large and small. (p. 162)

⁶⁴ Murray (2002, p. 159) notes that as part of the 1992 West Australian Government's *Taking Action: Domestic Violence Programs and Policies*, an education program to prevent domestic violence and child abuse was developed for delivery in state schools. The program was aimed at showing young people the link between healthy relationships and non-violence and helping them to develop appropriate interpersonal skills.

As part of the process for answering the question *Where we are going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia?*, this section has represented a *conversation* between my interpretation of the study participants' narratives and material from the academic and practice literature on domestic violence. In the following section, I continue my response to the question of where we are going, by deconstructing the text of brochures on domestic violence collected from local human service agencies.

An archaeological account of responding to domestic violence

In Chapter 2, I introduced the idea of a Foucauldian-style archaeology as a method to deconstruct discourses informing state-sponsored or state-endorsed responses to domestic violence. According to (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000), Foucault used the term archaeology to:

refer to the process of working through the historical archives of various societies to bring to light the discursive formations and events that have produced the fields of knowledge and discursive formations of different historical periods. (p. ix)

Within the cultural practices of responding to domestic violence, textual archives are many and varied. For example, there are policies and plans (action, operational and strategic) of government departments and policy units in Western Australia with responsibilities for domestic violence.⁶⁵ There are the policies and plans of non-government agencies working in the area, such as women's refuges and counselling agencies. There are codes of practice for professional groups (such as magistrates, psychologists and doctors) whose members are likely to encounter domestic violence as part of their work. As well, there are various pieces of legislation governing criminal

⁶⁵ According to *Whole of government, whole of community response to family and domestic violence (Family and Domestic Violence Unit, 2004)*, these government agencies are: Department for Community Development; WA Police Service; Legal Aid Commission; Department of Justice; Department of Health; Department of Education and Training; and Department of Housing and Works.

offences and restraining orders; treatment guides; manuals; evaluation reports; survivor narratives; theses, articles and books which outline theories about domestic violence; and brochures and videos used to inform and educate the wider public. As the focus of this study was on the possibilities for informal responding to domestic violence, brochures were considered an appropriate archive to explore. Through them, discourses represent themselves to victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses to domestic violence. McNay (1994) has explained the notion of an archive in the following way:

Like the episteme, the archive is defined as the general condition of possibility - the system of discursive regularities - which determines what can and cannot be spoken in a given historical era. Foucault stresses however, that the archive is composed of multiple and varying discourses; it is not, a limiting or constraining formation but an enabling system of rules which is never entirely complete and which is, therefore, always open to change. (p. 66)

Kendall and Wickham (1999) have described archaeology as a Foucauldian 'ordering tool'. For them, archaeological research is descriptive rather than interpretive and they have suggested a series of seven steps for carrying out an investigation. These steps have been followed here to make visible the discourses of state-sponsored responding to domestic violence, through identifying 'statements' located within a selection of brochures and booklets on domestic violence, produced by government (or government-funded) agencies. Of the 14 brochures collected, six were from the State Government's *Freedom from Fear* campaign and the other eight were produced by the Legal Aid Commission, the Western Australian Police Service, Waratah Support Centre, the South West Refuge, Family and Children's Services⁶⁶, and Centacare Marriage and Family Services. One brochure was produced jointly by three local, specialist domestic violence agencies and another brochure focusing on the effects of domestic violence on children, had no identification, although it listed only government agencies on its *help is available* page.

⁶⁶ At the time of the interviews and pamphlet analysis, Family and Children's Services was the statutory child welfare agency in Western Australia. Later, it changed its name to the Department for Community Development.

Knowledge: The visible and the sayable

The first step in Kendall and Wickham's deconstructive process is the identification of those things which can count as knowledge. From a Foucauldian perspective, what we *know* about something like responding to domestic violence, is made up of the words we can speak or read about and the things we can see. Some things about domestic violence are more *known* and therefore more sayable and visible than others. Most visible through the archive were the *helping* agencies listed above which were responsible for the production of the brochures.

The modernist view of knowledge suggests that we should speak of things as knowledge only when we believe them to be true; that is, we can speak or say things when we know them to be *facts*. However, Foucault's notion of power/knowledge suggests the reverse; that those things we consider to be factual knowledge are those things which we have been permitted to say (Foucault, 1972). Thus, the policy makers and service providers responsible for the brochures in the archive, claimed as factual knowledge those things permitted to appear in the archive. Some of the *sayable* statements included:

- *No one should have to live in a situation of domestic violence.*
- *Domestic violence includes emotional, physical, sexual and psychological abuse.*
- *If your partner or ex-partner or family member hurts, threatens or humiliates you, it is 'Domestic Violence'.*
- *Physical violence and threats of violence are crimes.*
- *Statistics show that in the majority of cases [domestic violence] involves men being violent towards women.*
- *[Domestic violence] often results in the victim feeling depressed, isolated, low in self esteem, frustrated and sometimes self destructive or suicidal.*
- *As children grow up and enter relationships of their own, they behave in the way they have learned. In this way, violent behaviour is passed on from one generation to the next.*
- *You need information and professional support to make good decisions.*

Statements are ordered in relation to one another

The second step in Kendall and Wickham's archaeological method, considers the relationship or ordering between statements located in the archive. The words in this archive, which reflected how the state and its agents respond to domestic violence, primarily were words of information and advice to women and men living with violence. Some of the most common information statements explained that domestic violence is about *power and control*, and listed the types of behaviours which count as domestic violence. Some statements informed that *physical violence, sexual assault, stalking and threats of violence are criminal behaviours*. Other common information statements were about where to access help. Finally, some brochures provided information about the impact of domestic violence on victims, particularly children, explaining, for example, that exposure to domestic violence *impacts on the emotional, psychological and social development of children*.

Advice in the brochures was directed at women (as victims) and men (as perpetrators) with the majority of brochures (and therefore advice) directed at women. Help was identified as professional, available and accessible. In relation to children, the advice was to seek help in order to (among other things) prevent domestic violence from *repeating generation after generation*. There was a template for how the statements would appear in the archive; firstly definitions and explanations about domestic violence, then a description of what the agency which had produced the brochure could do (such as counselling or emergency accommodation) and then encouragement and information on seeking help.

Rules for the 'repeatability of statements'

As a third step in the process, Kendall and Wickham have suggested that in order to uncover discourses within an archive, we need to consider what it is that allows certain statements to recur. Thus, "we need to examine what precisely it is that makes certain statements repeatable, to be part of the true" (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 27). There appeared to be two rules for the repeatability of statements in this archive and all of the brochures in the sample adhered to the rules. The first rule related to the allowable discursive positionings for understanding domestic violence. The second rule related to

the nature of the help available to survivor/victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

In order to explicate the first rule, I have drawn on O'Neill's (1998) typology of discursive positionings in relation to domestic violence. Statements appeared to be repeatable in this archive, or allowed 'to be part of the true' if they did not speak openly from either the discursive position of 'pathology' (which reflects a conservative and historically anti-feminist ideology) or the discursive position of 'wife abuse as a consequence of the normative social system' (which reflects a more radically feminist ideology). Rather, in order to appear in the archive, statements needed to allow for the more *acceptable* discourses (in this case, O'Neill's 'expressive tension', 'instrumental power' and 'learned behaviour') to remain intact; that is, for these discursive positionings not to be contradicted or challenged overtly by statements in the archive.

O'Neill has described the discourse of pathology as one which reflects the medical model. It incorporates theories of psychopathology, drawing on clinical assessments and psychiatric diagnoses such as psychosis, paranoia, borderline personality disorders, and schizophrenia (p. 460). Prior to the 1970s, before feminist analyses gained credence, the discourse of pathology (some of which focused on the *masochistic* tendencies of women) was used extensively to explain [away] domestic violence. None of the brochures in the archive suggested that domestic violence was the result of individual psychopathology or that some perpetrators might have a psychiatric illness in need of treatment.⁶⁷ Thus, the brochures avoided words and phrases such as mental illness, psychiatric disorder or diagnosis. They also avoided reference to extreme forms of domestic violence such as repeated torture, sadistic rape or the murder of women and

⁶⁷ However, Johnson and Campbell (1993) identified a small percentage of men in their sample of violent men dealing with separation, as demonstrating 'psychotic and paranoid' reactions to the separation. Similarly, Gondolf (1999) found that while psychopathology was less common among batterers than some would expect, a percentage of perpetrators still were deemed to have a significant mental illness.

children, behaviours which may suggest that the perpetrator suffers from some form of severe mental illness.

O'Neill has summarised the discursive position of 'wife abuse as a consequence of the normative social system' as one which "constructs wife abuse as a logical extension of various cultural norms and institutional practices in Western society" (p. 470). From this perspective, wife abuse is "a social action that reflects other social practices and beliefs within the whole, such as norms of violence and masculinity" (p. 470). Along with the instrumental power discourse, this discursive position is the most consistent with feminist theorising on domestic violence. However, if it was to be included in the archive, a statement could not reflect the discursive position of abuse as normative. Thus, words and phrases such as patriarchy, problematic masculinity, cultural norms and values, state-sanctioned institutional practices, cultural norms of domination and oppression, and misogyny did not appear in the archive. Similarly, none of the brochures suggested an explanatory link between domestic violence and other expressions of patriarchal domination and oppression (such as rape, the production and distribution of pornography, the feminisation of poverty and war) in the way that radical feminist theorising would do.

Not only did statements need to avoid reference to pathology and the idea of male violence as normative in order to appear in the archive, they also needed to allow for the acceptable discourses of expressive tension, instrumental power and learned behaviour to be present, unproblematically. For example, in the *Freedom from Fear* brochure *Has your partner hurt you?*, there is an implicit message that domestic violence is about poor conflict resolution:

Most couples in intimate relationships disagree about things and fight. Fair fighting is a part of normal, healthy relationships. In healthy relationships, both partners compromise and seek solutions to overcome their problems as equals. Problems arise if one partner feels threatened or frightened to argue back or give his/her opinion. The balance of power is no longer equal.
[emphasis in the original].

Here the notions of 'normal, healthy relationships' and 'balance of power' allow for the acceptable explanatory discourses of expressive tension and instrumental power to hold

as true in the archive. Domestic violence is represented as *unfair* and *unacceptable* expressive tension and as an *abuse* of instrumental power. Domestic violence is represented as poor conflict resolution, but not *only* poor conflict resolution and so none of the acceptable discursive positions has been challenged openly. The acceptable discourses of expressive tension and instrumental power also appeared in the archive through references to Walker's (1979) *cycle of violence*⁶⁸ and repeated references to domestic violence as being *about power and control*. The discursive positioning of learned behaviour, particularly trans-generational learning, was well represented in the archive. A number of the brochures urged readers to take action in order to prevent domestic violence being *passed on* to the next generation. For example, the *Freedom from Fear* brochure *When you hurt your partner, you hurt your children* made the following unequivocal statements:

*Patterns of violence and abuse are learned early on and can become a pattern for life. Perhaps you grew up in a violent family?*⁶⁹

The second rule which determined whether or not statements could appear in the archive was in relation to the nature of helping. My interpretation of the brochures was that all of them represented help-seeking as something desirable, possible and relatively unproblematic. For example, none of the brochures talked about the difficulties which may be encountered in help-seeking such as disinterested or incompetent professionals, even though a significant number of women who seek help for marital violence find professionals unhelpful (Otter, 1986; Patton, 2003). The brochure from the Legal Aid

⁶⁸ Walker's cycle of violence suggests a series of phases in a violent relationship from one of remorse on the part of the perpetrator (a honeymoon phase), through a build-up of tension phase to an eventual 'explosion' of violence. This model has been represented widely as a way of understanding the entrapment aspect of domestic violence, suggesting that women are wooed sufficiently during the honeymoon phase to believe the violence will stop for good (Dutton, 1998; K. Wilson, 1997).

⁶⁹ Such statements distort the theorising on social learning (Bandura, 1977), which recognises the family as only one of the possible influences on behaviour. The statements drawing on social learning theory as an explanation for domestic violence also misrepresent the scientific evidence. While there is evidence of a correlation between family-of-origin violence and family-of-procreation violence, the evidence of a causal link is weak (Dutton, 1998; J. Fraser, 1999; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002; Saville, Wilkinson, O'Donnell, & Colley, 1981; Tomison, 2000).

Commission came closest to violating this rule for inclusion by intimating that the police response may not be what women expect, and by offering itself as an agency which could be used to hold the police accountable for their (inadequate) response. The issue of limited access to help (due to waiting lists, cost or distance) was ignored and none of the brochures warned women that they are most at risk of assault once they have made known or acted on their decision to leave a violent partner (P. Easteal, 1993; Peled et al., 2000). Thus, women were neither warned about the risks to their safety nor given any strategies to deal with fluctuating risk factors.

Thus, for statements to appear in the archive, they needed to avoid proposing either a pathological analysis or an overtly structural, feminist analysis of domestic violence. They also needed to couch their information and advice in ways which actively persuaded men and women to seek professional help by avoiding any reference to the difficulties or problems that could be encountered.

Subject positions made possible through the archive

As a fourth step in the archaeological process, Kendall and Wickham suggest that Foucault's methods should be used "to explore the ways culture operates as a set of governmental practices aimed at producing certain sorts of persons" (p. 150).

According to McNay (1994):

The archaeological method is developed ... to counter approaches to knowledge which privilege a 'sovereign' subject anterior to discourse. It is not the individual who imparts meaning to discourse, rather it is the discursive formation that provides an array of 'subject positions' which individuals may occupy. A series of dispersed statements may be unified, therefore, by a certain regularity in the way in which subject positions, or enunciative modalities, are distributed among them. (p. 68)

The principal 'enunciative modalities' represented in this archive were occupied by the stakeholders with the power to re/produce the archive in the first place; that is, the professional helping agencies and their state sponsor (the latter voiced through the *Freedom from Fear* campaign brochures). According to Danaher et al. (2000), Foucault understood knowledge as "something that makes us its subjects, because we make sense of ourselves by referring back to various bodies of knowledge" (p. xiv). Throughout

this archive, the power/knowledge established through the claims about domestic violence produced a range of subject positions:

- children who witness and/or experience domestic violence;
- victim/survivors;
- perpetrators;
- relatives and friends of victims and perpetrators;
- professional helpers such as police, counsellors, lawyers and refuge workers; and
- the state.

Relationships between the various subject positions seemed to be established and maintained throughout the archive by those who got to 'do the speaking' (McNay, 1994). Survivor/victims, who had no voice in the archive and were identified as *damaged, isolated and deprived*, occupied a position whereby they were subjugated by the perpetrators of domestic violence. The Waratah brochure for example stated that victims *will experience high levels of fear, frequently develop a sense of powerlessness and lack control of their lives*. This subjugation was portrayed as involuntary with the exception of a *Freedom from Fear* brochure directed at women, which represented women as acting with agency to the extent that women were advised: *If you don't think he is capable of changing then you must decide whether or not you are going to put up with the abuse*. This statement was a profound unit of meaning for me because it was one of the few statements which constituted women as agential, while criticising them implicitly if they chose to stay with their partner. Firstly, the statement implied that I/she had not been making decisions related to the abuse prior to my/her encountering the brochure. Secondly, to *put up with* implies forbearance and a level of choice that many of us/them as victim/survivors may not have. Thus, we/they may find our/themselves being criticised and subjugated by the state through the language in the brochures, as well as by the perpetrators of abuse.

Perpetrators were represented in the archive as angry and violent, occasionally remorseful, and the *Freedom from Fear* 12-page booklet for men suggested they might feel *overwhelmed or out of control*. The message was that men dominate and subjugate women and children and their behaviour is particularly damaging to children who

witness it. There were no statements in the archive about how being violent might affect the lives of perpetrators, in the way there were statements about the impact of violence on survivor/victims. Thus, perpetrators were denied a subject position deserving of concern. In the archive, for example, there was no suggestion that perpetrators may be depressed, suicidal, afraid or embarrassed by their violence, yet these feelings, in a different context, would warrant our concern.

Perpetrators of domestic violence largely escaped the subject position of criminal in the archive. The issue of domestic violence as criminal behaviour was peripheral throughout the archive and the brochure produced by the Western Australian Police Service was directed at victim/survivors rather than perpetrators. In the *Freedom from Fear* booklet targeting *men who want to change*, less than 4% of the text addressed the issue of domestic violence as criminal behaviour, and then only in the context of asking men how they would feel if they were arrested. Perpetrators, unlike victim/survivors of abuse, had a voice in the archive. Throughout the booklet, four men spoke, alongside the authoritative voice of the state, describing their behaviour and providing testimony to the change process.

Trained professionals occupied important enunciative modalities in the archive. They got to say what domestic violence is, what causes it and what you should do about it. They positioned themselves (and were positioned by the state through the *Freedom from Fear* materials) as essential for assisting survivor/victims, perpetrators and children to overcome the impacts of domestic violence. For the most part, professionals occupied a single, unified and authoritatively equal subject position in the archive. The exception was in relation to the Western Australian Police Service and the Legal Aid Commission whereby the commission positioned itself as having authority to hold the police accountable in their dealings with victims of violence: *If the police do not use their powers to protect you, contact the Legal Aid Domestic Violence Unit.*

Finally, relatives and friends of victims and perpetrators had a minor (and in relation to women, contradictory) position in the archive. They were mentioned in one brochure

directed at women as a possible cause of a woman returning to her violent partner: *Women who leave often return to their partners, hoping for an improvement in the relationship or because of money matters or pressure from family and friends.* In the same brochure, family members and friends were referred to as source of support: *You may want to ask a close friend or relative to go with you when you seek help.* In a brochure outlining local specialist domestic violence services, the family and friends of victims were offered counselling and support. No similar offer was made to the family and friends of perpetrators. In the booklet directed at perpetrators, however, friends and family were represented as a source of support on a par with professional counsellors: *If you are feeling overwhelmed or out of control you must find immediate support from friends, family or a professional counsellor.*

Surfaces of emergence

Foucault demonstrated how ideas (taken for granted as things with static and universal meaning, such as madness, crime or sexuality) could be thought of instead as ‘objects in discourse’ rather than truths (Hacking, 1999). Framed this way, ideas are malleable across time and space, through the positioning of alternative truth claims and discursive practices (Foucault, 1972). Interpreting Foucault, Howe (cited in Wood, 1997) has argued for caution in the construction of new, alternative (and particularly liberating) knowledge/s, discourse and objects because of the way in which the universal truths which develop around objects (such as domestic violence) “first become normative before they become coercive” (p. 22). The discursive objects created by/embedded in the archive under study were *domestic violence* and *helping/help-seeking* (where there is domestic violence).

To understand how objects are made into discourse, Kendall and Wickham (1999) have suggested as a fifth step in the archaeological process, that we focus on ‘surfaces of emergence’ where objects of the discourse are ‘designated and acted upon’ (p. 26). For McNay (1994), such a place “denotes the complex of social and normative relations that allow an object to first appear in order to be taken up by a discursive formation” (p. 72). In this archive, the surface of emergence which dominated was the formal helping

agency: the refuge, counselling service or government agency which had represented itself through the brochures. On this surface, the objects of the discourse (firstly domestic violence and secondly helping/help-seeking) were created. In the archive, domestic violence was designated repeatedly as a particular set of behaviours; that is, physical, emotional, economic, sexual and psychological abuse (rather than, for example, as a cultural or structural phenomenon, as a consequence of the social system or as a normative practice of hegemonic masculinity). Helping/help-seeking was designated as actions or activities which agencies could provide and victim/survivors or perpetrators could access. It included such things as *protection, assistance, advocacy, counselling, representation, referral* and *group programs*. Helping/help-seeking (in terms of what was on offer and what was needed) was designated further in the archive as predominantly professional and formal, rather than voluntary and informal.

Invisible in this archive was the domain of the home (itself object and domain) (J. Price, 2002) where the object of domestic violence might be designated less as a set of behaviours and more as an aspect of the everyday, ongoing embodiment of violation of home and family.⁷⁰ Just as the domain of the home was invisible in the archive, so too was the help of lay practitioners who are connected to the home space: neighbours, family and friends, the women and children who live with violence and the perpetrators of the violence.

Authoritative institutions

McNay (1994) has illustrated how through particular forms of authorisation, institutions come to define objects. Thus, she has noted Foucault's observation of how the medical profession (legitimated through its location within physical institutions such as hospitals and universities) has been able to define the object of madness (p. 69-72). For Kendall

⁷⁰ This reading comes from the study narratives where home, family and the violation of the body and spirit by domestic violence featured so strongly, particularly in the narratives of those who had lived intimately with the violence. The contemplation of *losing* home and family (the physical *and* the idea/I) acted as a powerful magnet for some women to stay in a violent relationship.

and Wickham (1999) describing the institutions which “acquire authority and provide limits within which discursive objects may act” (p. 27), becomes the sixth step in the archaeological process. There were two visible and authoritative institutions in this archive: the state represented through the voice of its own institutions (the law, the police, and the administrative bureaucracy, including the Family and Domestic Violence Unit and government departments) and religious and sectarian social welfare agencies.⁷¹ Together, these institutions acquired authority and delimited what domestic violence was considered to be and what kind of help was available.

The institution of the family (as extended, political and powerful rather than nuclear, private and vulnerable) was invisible in the archive as an authoritative institution. Likewise, institutions located in civil society (such as Neighbourhood Watch, churches, sporting clubs and other associations) did not appear in the archive as authoritative around the objects of domestic violence and helping/help-seeking.

Grids of specification

Kendall and Wickham’s final step in the process of deconstruction through archaeology, is one of identifying ‘grids of specification’ which McNay (1994) has defined as “those systems and forms of differentiation against which an object is classified, measured and defined” (p. 72). In the archive of the brochures, it was the authoritative language of the law and social welfare/psychology (representing the antidotes to criminality and deviance) which simultaneously defined the object of domestic violence (as a set of behaviours) and made the object of helping/help-seeking necessary, desirable, and relatively unproblematic.

⁷¹ However, social welfare agencies (including counselling services and refuges) are governed closely by the legislature and the bureaucracy, through the latter’s role in policy formation and implementation (that is, funding). *(footnote continued)*

Although statistical data is the form of specification most often used to classify and measure domestic violence and its impact, it was used in only one of the items in the archive to support statements. In the *Freedom from Fear* brochure, *The impact of domestic violence: The facts*, there were statistics related to health issues (for women), incidence rates, issues related to children, the economic cost of domestic violence and the criminal justice system. The statistics constructed women as the subjects of domestic violence. As a consequence, the costs to men of being violent (such as health costs and incarceration rates) were not specified. However, statistics may not be necessary when statements are presented as unequivocal facts with little room for uncertainty, contradiction or ambiguity.

In summary, domestic violence was 'rendered accessible to us' (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 28) through the brochure archive. The object of domestic violence was presented as a particular set of behaviours which could be listed and defined. This list of behaviours - physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse - **became** domestic violence. Similarly, the object of helping/help-seeking was classified and defined in the brochures through language which stated authoritatively what help was needed and further, that help was necessary, desirable and readily available. For example, according to the brochure from Family and Children's Services: *Perpetrators of domestic violence who want to address their behaviour can be helped by getting information and advice and being referred to specific programs*. This statement appeared several times despite there being no specific programs available in Western Australia outside the metropolitan area or large regional centres.

Radical feminist theorising about domestic violence (that is, that domestic violence is a consequence of a social system which tolerates, condones and at times, actively encourages domination and oppression of women by men through violence) and the

Thus, Jamrozik (2001) suggests that the notion of the third sector as independent of the state is spurious given the extent to which most third sector agencies rely on government funds to operate.

possibilities for lay helping where there is domestic violence, are ideas invisible in the discourse of formal helping agencies. Thus, the idea that some perpetrators of domestic violence may have serious psychiatric disorders has disappeared from the dominant everyday representations of the issue. In its place is a conceptualisation of domestic violence as caused by instrumental and expressive violence and learned behaviour. Further, domestic violence is constructed largely as a set of behaviours which sit within a context of power and control and the primary response to the issue is one of professional and qualified help for victims (as necessary) and perpetrators (as desirable).

Discursive elements shaping responses to domestic violence

So far in this chapter, to answer the question *Where are we going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia?*, I have explored the literature on responding to domestic violence in the context of the more chaotic practices of responding which emerged from the study participants' narratives. Through an investigation of one archive of the cultural practices of state-sponsored responses (brochures on domestic violence), I also have tried to uncover discursive elements which create/are created by the representations of domestic violence made visible through the archive. In this section, I explore in more detail some of those discursive elements.

Domestic violence as power and control

During the 1980s in Western Australia, radical feminist understandings of domestic violence were being enacted primarily through an activist women's refuge movement. Feminist activists, often with the support of pro-feminist (or at least not anti-feminist) politicians, bureaucrats and femocrats⁷², had considerable success in having domestic violence recognised as a criminal offence and in securing refuge funding. They also

⁷² In Australia, *femocrat* emerged in the 1970s as a term for feminist bureaucrats (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Summers, 2003).

succeeded in positioning domestic violence theoretically alongside other forms of violence against women, within a broader social and political context of patriarchal Western culture (Murray, 2002). Thus, for a time, the discursive position of domestic violence as a consequence of a normative patriarchal society, held some sway. What was happening in Western Australia paralleled what was happening elsewhere in Australia and in other Western countries. For example, in 1985, the National Conference on Domestic Violence, held in Canberra, prefaced its proceedings with a statement which endorsed explicitly a radical feminist understanding of domestic violence:

the [conference] program was constructed on the premise that woman battering, despite being enacted between individuals, is both shaped and legitimised by the gender based structural inequalities within society. (Hatty, 1986, p. xvii)

According to Murray (2002), in Western Australia by 1990, the government was “naming domestic violence and incorporating feminist understandings into its policies” (p. 116). Murray attributes this to the politicisation of the issue through the struggle to secure refuge funding and research which exposed the extent and significance of domestic assaults against women. Thus, the recognition of domestic violence as a public issue which could be understood and responded to using a feminist analysis, had been achieved in the space of two decades.

However, the archaeological investigation in the previous section suggests that any ‘feminist understandings’ by the state or its agents have been short lived. Contemporary discourses acceptable to government now seem to be those which suggest that domestic violence is caused by instrumental power, expressive tension and intergenerational transmission through learned behaviour. None of these explanations of domestic violence challenges or contradicts a feminist understanding of the issue, but neither does it support explicitly the more radical feminist view as expressed, for example, by Hatty. As Ashcraft (2000) notes, “activists have often framed the issue within the dominant discourse by either softening or omitting the more threatening aspect of their reconstruction of the problem” in order to ensure that they could provide for the immediate needs of women living with abuse (p. 3).

It is the discourse of instrumental power, illustrated through the Power and Control Wheel, which is used most commonly to represent domestic violence. This framing of domestic violence is acceptable to feminist practitioners because implicit in its theorising is the view that it is men who dominate using instrumental power. While the wheel illustrates the experiences of many (if not most) women who present at refuges and other victim/survivor services (Mederos, 1999, p. 133), it avoids any direct reference to the idea that men's use of instrumental control may be a consequence of a normative but problematic internalised construction of masculinity. Thus, it seems to be an ambiguous liberal feminist understanding (rather than a radical one) which is acceptable to the state and which is allowed to be represented through state-sponsored texts such as brochures. It is a decontextualised instrumental power discourse, presented without explanation or reasoning, which has come to dominate representations of domestic violence through the state and its sponsored agencies.

How has this happened? Latour's notion of *black boxing* (cited in Kendall and Wickham, 1999) offers a way of thinking about this. Kendall and Wickham have described black boxing as a method by which 'science' can keep moving forward.

'Black box' is a term used in cybernetics: when something is too complex to be fully explained or represented, a black box is drawn to replace the complex arrangement; arrows indicate what goes into the black box, and what goes out, but the actual contents and workings of the box are not examined. (1999, p. 73)

I suggest that the notion of *domestic violence as power and control* has been black boxed by some practitioners, academics, researchers and policy makers working from a wide range of both feminist and non-feminist ideological positions, in order to allow these disparate groups to make progress in responding to domestic violence, despite the substantial differences in ideology which exist between them. Instrumental power as an explanatory framework for domestic violence effectively has been black boxed in the

Power and Control Wheel, which simultaneously defines domestic violence and offers a causal explanation (that is, it is all about power and control).⁷³

The notion of power and control to explain domestic violence is almost inviolable and satisfies all parties, at least for the purpose of working together on coordinating committees and projects. Thus, a range of key stakeholders have reached a tacit agreement about domestic violence which allows us to continue to develop service responses. This tacit agreement could be described as one in which the ownership of domestic violence has been re-conferred on the state in return for the state's (and its sponsored agencies') portrayal of domestic violence as:

- a serious issue;
- where the victims predominantly are women and the perpetrators men;
- where power and control is used as an explanatory tool;
- where pathology as an explanation is avoided;⁷⁴ and
- where the criminal justice system acknowledges it publicly as a criminal offence.

In return for the state agreeing to *do something* about domestic violence, as feminists we seem to have relinquished the power/knowledge claims we held around the issue for a brief period of time. With that, we have sacrificed the right to have radical feminist understandings of domestic violence represented publicly and to have untrained activist practitioners (volunteer and paid) recruited and respected on a par with trained

⁷³ I'm presenting this here as if it is a universal and totalising picture of the formation of discursive practices for responding to domestic violence in Western Australia. Of course, it is not. It reflects one way of understanding what has been happening in mainstream service delivery. Few Indigenous women for example have black boxed domestic violence as power and control and continue to resist white feminist portrayals of domestic violence as it is experienced and understood. Most Indigenous services providers claim the term Indigenous family violence over domestic violence and through this, they have established some freedom to develop their own discursive practices around responding to the issue of violence in their families and communities (Blagg, 2000).

⁷⁴ Although not particularly sympathetic to feminist theorising on domestic violence, Dutton (1998) has summarised Bograd's (1988) original concerns about psychopathological explanations for domestic violence, noting that "a poor psychological background is too often used as an excuse for an individual perpetrator, simultaneously exonerating him and undercutting our will to change the society that fostered his behaviour" (p. 27).

professionals. Bacchi (1999), like Ferraro (1996), has viewed this in the context of women's engagement with the state, in particular with state institutions where issues are defined as social problems to be managed technically and administratively. Hearn (1996a) has described a similar scenario from his perspective:

What we have here is a series of concessions from the state, and particularly state agencies controlled by men, in response to individual men's violence to women. The state has thus sponsored particular social forms within the private domain. Increasingly, but rather gradually, the private powers of men - individual husbands and fathers - have been brought into the control of the state. Most importantly, legal and other state constructions of violence have generally served to play down its significance and to constrain its definition, while at the same time there has been a gradually increased awareness and recognition of the problem in law, policy statement and, to an extent, in policy implementation. (p. 27)

As a consequence, as Ferraro (1996) has noted, it becomes possible for politicians and bureaucrats "to oppose 'domestic violence' and at the same time oppose all other efforts to restructure relations of dominance, including women's subordination" (¶ 2).

Has it just been a naive trade-off with feminists handing responsibility to the state and the state co-opting women's issues so we no longer constitute a threat to the patriarchy? Not necessarily. Feminism, in most of its guises, essentially is both a product and project of modernism, committed to identity politics and progressive social action (Bolatito, 2003). Many of us have accepted and participated in the technical, rational aspects of a state-sponsored response which has seen the development of much-needed services as well as a plethora of strategies, action plans, protocols, best practice manuals, and training for practitioners. We have encouraged and welcomed the move to enforce a criminal justice response to domestic violence, buoyed by experiences where it has been successful in reducing the incidence of violence against women in the home (Holder, 1999). However, an over-enthusiastic or uncritical embracing of any specific theoretical framework, discourse, policy or model (particularly those which tacitly become acceptable to a divergent group of stakeholders) inevitably risks a closure (intentional or not) to alternative ideas and spaces for responding materially and symbolically to domestic violence.

Subjugated knowledge/s and discourses

Foucault (1980) studied the development and institutionalization of what he termed 'global unitary knowledges' that, through a struggle over time, have come to subjugate a whole set of knowledges and disqualify them as 'beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity'. (Hartman, 1992, p. 483)

Inevitably, as a consequence of the dominance of institutionalised discourses around domestic violence, some knowledge/s have been subjugated. Firstly, the idea that some women who have lived with (and continue to live with) violent partners may see themselves as expert, skilled practitioners of resistance (who may use violence as retaliation) rather than simply as victim/survivors has not been acknowledged widely.⁷⁵ For the most part, women are presented in the academic and practice literature as passive victims of abuse with limited agency while men's agency tends to be exaggerated.⁷⁶ In the brochures, the dominant construction of men was that they *do* (hit, control, phone the helpline, change their behaviour) while women *are done to* (beaten, controlled, made fearful). In the brochures, the only acceptable active role for a woman living with violence was to leave the relationship or stay provided her partner sought help. These ways of thinking about domestic violence leave virtually no space for alternative constructions of women's responses which can include (as well as the expert strategising and decision-making), actions which aim to stop, thwart, expose or retaliate against the violence.

Secondly, a dominant discourse which explains domestic violence as an abuse of instrumental power (that is, as power and control) tends to construct domestic violence as a relatively homogenous phenomenon with a single cause (Dell & Korotana, 2000). Domestic violence as power and control has become one of Foucault's 'global unitary knowledges' (cited in Hartman, 1992, p. 483). This effectively has silenced a notion of domestic violence as a complex phenomenon with a range of causal factors, including

⁷⁵ Bowker (1993), Eisikovits et al., (1998), Hubbard (1992) and Peled et al. (2000) are some exceptions.

⁷⁶ However, as Bagshaw et al. (1999) have noted, men who use violence in the home don't necessarily see themselves as agential in this way.

the possibility of severe psychopathology on the part of the individual perpetrator and a problematic, hegemonic masculinity across the wider society. The idea that domestic violence may be an expression of normative patriarchal power which at times is sanctioned by the institutional arrangements of the state, in particular the workings of the criminal justice system (Brown, 1992) similarly is subjugated.

Thirdly, despite the evidence that most people use informal, untrained and often inexperienced lay helpers to support them to deal with violence in their lives, at least initially, this knowledge rarely informs the discursive practices which promote dominant ways of helping where there is domestic violence. Professional help is offered as a packaged and desirable commodity, standardised and quality controlled (through training and professional qualifications) (Leonard, 1997). However, professional help (particularly that which operates through narrowly defined definitions of domestic violence and modernist legal frameworks for responding) may be inadequate.

Fourthly, other knowledge/s which remain subjugated, suggest that perpetrators of domestic violence may be open to offers of informal support, and that this support may be effective. The idea that informal support for perpetrators of violence was possible and desirable, was suggested to me during a conference presentation by Ann O'Neill, a West Australian woman whose ex-husband attempted to kill her before murdering their two children. In her poetic representation of her experiences, Ann queried why no one had supported her husband following their separation.

Perpetrators' willingness to engage with informal support emerged in the study through the narratives of Michael and Simon. Both reflected on support they had received which was non-judgemental but which did not collude with their use of violence. More recently, the idea that family and friends may be willing and able productively to support perpetrators of violence was raised through a television documentary *Losing the children* (Jackson, 2004), which told the story of Patrick Dalton, a man with a history of

abuse towards his wife, who killed their two infant children and then himself, the day after he was subject to (what he considered to be) an unfavourable Family Court decision. The Dalton story closely resembled Janet's story about the murder/suicide of her grandchildren and son-in-law. Janet's son-in-law was alone with his children for several days leading up to the murder/suicide, with no apparent pro-active support from family or friends. However, in the Dalton story, in the days leading up to the Family Court decision, Patrick received practical and emotional support from several family members. Some of these family members also tried to alert authorities to their concerns that he was unstable and a potential threat to himself and his children. In the lead-up to the murder/suicide, Patrick's informal supporters dropped away at the critical time of the court decision. The facilitator of his men's group seemed to be the only formal service provider involved and he seemed unaware of the informal supporters who had stepped forward and (as far as it is possible to tell from the narrative) were in need of intensive support, advice and information around their informal support role. Most texts which encourage the strengthening of informal social supports (such as Bagshaw et al., 2000; Goff, 2001; L. Kelly, 1996; Patton, 2003; Wilcox, 2000) focus on strengthening women's support to other women (for good reason) and men's support (and/or supervision) of other men remains neglected as a research issue.⁷⁷

Fifthly, there appears to be a profound silencing in relation to the physical and mental health consequences for men when they perpetrate violence. None of the brochures addressing perpetrators of violence, suggested that there could be severe, negative consequences for the men's health as a result of their perpetration of violence. Although there is a strong community belief that alcohol abuse *causes* domestic violence, there seems to have been little interest in investigating how health problems (such as stress, depression or substance abuse) may be one of the consequences of *using* violence. There seems to be a confluence of interest between pro-feminist theorists and

⁷⁷ Jenkins (1990) has argued that family and friends need to avoid colluding with the 'restraints on respectful functioning' which may be in place for perpetrators. As informal supporters will tend to act through dominant discourses in relation to domestic violence and define domestic violence and those who experience it in narrow and unhelpful ways, then education and support for informal supporters becomes essential.

those who support ideas of traditional masculinity to maintain a construct of men as agential at all times.

Finally, one of the discourses silenced by dominant causal constructions of domestic violence, and our responses to it, has been non-violence. With the exception of occasional community education programs on healthy relationships, theorising and practice in the area of non-violence (for example, in relation to parenting, school bullying and workplace harassment) as a systemic response to violence in the home has remained poorly developed (Rees, 2003; Schmidt, 1995).

When we respond to domestic violence in this way, who gains, who loses and by what mechanisms of power?

The third *phronetic* question addressed in this chapter asks *When we respond to domestic violence in this way, who gains, who loses and by what mechanisms of power?* In the previous section, I sought to illustrate how dominant discourses currently shaping domestic violence intervention in Western Australia singularise and totalise power and control as an explanation of abuse (and in doing so, largely exclude radical feminist theorising), narrowly define the subjectivities of victims and perpetrators, and privilege the idea of helping by trained professionals in formal agency settings. In this section, I reflect briefly on who gains and who loses as a consequence of these constructions and identify mechanisms of power which seem to support dominant ideas about acceptable domestic violence responses.

According to Hacking (1999), the process of deconstruction is one of unmasking power relationships. He has noted that for social constructionists like himself, who recognise

that something like domestic violence is an idea rather than a social fact, 'politics, ideology, and power' are what matter because:

Talk of construction tends to undermine the authority of knowledge and categorization. It challenges complacent assumptions about the inevitability of what we have found out or our present ways of doing things - not by refuting or proposing a better, but by 'unmasking'. (p. 58)

However, Hacking's interpretation poses a dilemma for feminist research/practitioners. Action (or 'proposing a better') is an essential aspect of feminist research into violence against women (Bograd, 1990; Knight & Hatty, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983). The challenge for the postmodern feminist researcher is to find ways of proposing better ways of doing things, believing but not assuming that they *are* better. This way, the researcher fulfils the Foucauldian imperative of 'suspended judgement' (Kendall & Wickham, 1999) without collapsing into the nihilism of skeptical or ludic postmodern critique. Fook (2002) makes a similar point on the way deconstruction, as a tool for unmasking power relations, unsettles taken-for-granted assumptions and places accounts, representations and texts under scrutiny. She notes:

Uncovering these assumptions automatically implies that these are questionable and therefore automatically exposes them for scrutiny. Resistance thus involves a stance and willingness to question prevailing and implicit assumptions, particularly for their relevance to power relations. (p. 95)

In this section, I am asking whose interests are served and whose are subjugated, when the state and its sponsored agencies construct domestic violence and helping in the ways they do. I am not trying to refute or show as false, particular ideas about domestic violence intervention. Rather, the purpose here is to question why domestic violence and the notion of helping/help-seeking have been constructed as they have; to expose/unmask some elements of the discourse while trying to be reflexive about my own interests in the issue. These interests are manifested through my subjectivities which emerge from my membership of a family and community where there has been/is/may be domestic violence.

Who gains?

Our contemporary frames for understanding (and resourcing) responses to domestic violence serve a range of interests, including my own. Some victim/survivors and perpetrators of abuse, academics, professionals and politicians gain from the normative definitions and responses to domestic violence which have been outlined above.

Many survivor/victims and perpetrators of domestic violence undoubtedly have gained as a consequence of contemporary understandings about domestic violence and the institutionalisation of professional helping. Recurrent funding (for women's refuges, specialist counselling services and men's groups) has made these services substantially more available than they were 30 years ago. As Murray (2002) notes:

In 1974, donations of 50 cents per week from Perth's feminists and their supporters kept Nardine afloat, and there were no government funds identified for domestic violence services. In 2001, the Department for Community Development ... allocated over \$12 million to non-government domestic violence services, of which \$10 million was for crisis accommodation. (p. 179)⁷⁸

Similarly, despite the capacity of the Power and Control Wheel to narrowly define, describe and explain the idea of domestic violence, its development and widespread dissemination have legitimated many women's experience of domestic violence (Mederos, 1999) and given professionals and lay practitioners (including victim/survivors and perpetrators) a useful way of conceptualising and responding to the problem.

The continued identification of domestic violence as a serious social problem has generated interest and funding for academics to research the issue. State and federal government agencies concerned with crime prevention, health education, law reform, family and children's services, women's issues, Indigenous issues, and offender rehabilitation have a stake in domestic violence research and generally support ongoing

⁷⁸ Nardine was one of the first feminist-inspired women's refuge in Western Australia.

funding. The privileging of certain ways of understanding domestic violence and how we best respond ensures that a range of academic and practice disciplines, in particular law, medicine, psychology and social work go unchallenged as guardians of the 'true' expert knowledge.

Constructing training and qualifications as necessary and desirable for domestic violence intervention, secures paid work for predominantly white, middle class professionals such as police, lawyers, social [welfare] workers, psychologists and nurses. For example, the Western Australian Police Service recently created specialist Child Protection and Family Violence Officer positions at sergeant level, creating promotion opportunities for officers in each police district. Constructing domestic violence as a problem that requires specialist individual intervention (rather than social and cultural change initiatives) provides employment for those trained in the traditional service professions. Where there has been a focus on community education and research (for example, with the *Freedom from Fear* campaign), opportunities for employment and status have been extended to health promotion professionals and market researchers.⁷⁹ Privatisation policies have meant lucrative contracts to private research, marketing and advertising consultants. Summers (2003) identified a steady increase in Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) funding going to consultants over the life of the program and concludes:

While these vast amounts of money are being thrown at consultants by the federal government, or not being spent at all, those women at the coalface who run the services that provide refuge and other support for the women and children victims of domestic violence are struggling under budgets that have scarcely increased in years. (p. 96)

Politicians benefit when domestic violence is constructed within the narrow confines of aberrant behaviour and explained in ways which focus on the individual rather than on

⁷⁹ Murray (2002, p. 171) notes for example how the Liberal government originally described the *Freedom from Fear* campaign as an 'innovative social marketing initiative'.

the wider social context. Various politicians have declared publicly the goal of making Australia ‘free from violence in the home’ as part of their electioneering (Murray, 2002). These kinds of statements would not be possible if there was a dominant view that domestic violence is a consequence of the normative social structure because a structural analysis implicates the state and demands a radical social change agenda.⁸⁰

Who loses?

As definitions of domestic violence, causal factors and intervention strategies have been consolidated (in ways acceptable to and supported by a Eurocentric, capitalist, patriarchal state), the women and children who live with domestic violence continue to be the principal losers, along with lay members of the community who witness domestic violence, whether or not they feel compelled to respond. For example, for Sally, witnessing the abuse and being powerless to stop it, was as distressing for her as she believed the abuse was for her neighbour:

Sally: *When we first moved in I fought and fought and fought to get her out. I didn't want her to live next door to me. And I thought I have got six months in this place and I don't want her there. And I really did, I got on the phone to her real estate agent all the time, wrote letters, everything. Got a copy of every single letter I ever wrote. All the rest of it. And as selfish as it was, I didn't want it in my backyard. I don't care where it goes, I just don't want it in my backyard. That's a really selfish attitude but at the same time.... This is as distressing for me, or for the people in that house, as it is for her getting beaten. She's not gonna move, you're going to have to get her out, or we're gonna have to move ourselves. And ... I just kept on fighting to the point that one day, I went, I am sick of fighting. I have to fight these people, to prove to them that I am actually losing my sanity living next to this person.*

⁸⁰ This point is exceptionally well illustrated by Howe (1997) who analysed a series (*The war against women*) which ran in *The Age* newspaper in June 1993. Howe undertook a Foucauldian-style analysis to show how violence against women was represented in the series, and how the newspaper had to backtrack and manage the fallout when it inadvertently allowed to be ‘put into discourse’ the idea that violence against women was a consequence of a patriarchal society, rather than the aberrant behaviour of a few individual men.

Male perpetrators of abuse also lose when responses to their violence are inadequate or ineffective in stopping their behaviour. Most studies of the relationship between violence and health concentrate on the mental and physical consequences of violence on victims (for example Krug et al., 2002) with little attention to the consequences of *being* violent on the physical and mental health of perpetrators. Tulley (1997) has cited McLean who viewed “the perpetrators of violent acts as victims of their own masculinity” (p. 5). According to Tulley, “macho boys and men suffer through their understanding of masculinity and their living out of practices involving violence, control and the worst of patriarchy” (1997, p. 5).⁸¹ This process of ‘living out’ a violent, hegemonic masculinity can mean that perpetrators of domestic violence are more at risk of experiencing marital breakdown, depression and alcohol and other substance abuse. The stresses associated with these experiences have their own impact in terms of increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression and suicide (Bradley, 1998; Lee & Owens, 2002).

Children in particular lose when we respond to domestic violence in ways which are narrowly prescribed and/or limited in their effectiveness. In the study narratives, children often were involved in the abuse, either as primary targets of assault, as witnesses to assaults on their mother or as the targets of threats to kill. Tomison (2000) provides an extensive overview of the research on links between domestic violence and child maltreatment; the link is premised on research findings which suggest “that different types of violence may occur simultaneously in the same family, and that the presence of one form of violence may be a strong predictor of the other” (p. 1).

Inadequate or ineffective responding to domestic violence may have a negative impact on children when the response to the violence triggers state surveillance of the family for the purpose of *child protection* (Donzelot, 1979; J. Fraser, 1999). While there is strong evidence of a link between domestic violence and child abuse/neglect, the nature

⁸¹ Tulley (1997) raises these issues, mindful of the suffering of those on the receiving end of male violence.

of the linkage is complex and the politics of intervention in both forms of family violence are fraught with contestation and uncertainty. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of research which seeks to demonstrate the negative consequences of children witnessing domestic violence (Blanchard, Molloy, & Brown, 1992; J. Edleson, 1999; Peled, 1996). The results of this kind of research have been used to suggest that women who *expose* their children to domestic violence are failing to protect them from a serious form of abuse/neglect and this in turn has justified state intervention as a child protection (rather than domestic violence) response (Magen, cited in Tomison, 2000). At the same time, child protection workers (including social workers) have been criticised consistently for responding ineffectively where there is domestic violence (J. Healy, 1984; Maynard, 1985). Twenty years on from these well-known critiques, it is difficult to know if much has changed. Tomison (2000) concludes from his research that:

a failure to acknowledge the realities of women's lives in violent households can lead to mother blaming and inappropriate professional expectations that women should be able to protect their children in situations of extreme risk, situations where the child protection system is unable or unwilling to protect them. (p. 12)

In the study, the conflation between state responses to child abuse and domestic violence, was demonstrated most profoundly through Sally's narrative, which is interleaved between this chapter and the next. Sally heard and witnessed her neighbour Tracey being assaulted and harassed by her ex-partner who repeatedly was breaching a restraining order. Although Sally was ambivalent about her feelings towards Tracey (sometimes sympathetic, at other times frightened and frustrated) and at times critical of her parenting, she was surprised when the children were removed from Tracey's care.⁸² Since our interview, the Western Australian Police Service has new guidelines for responding to domestic violence which firmly embed a child protection response when children witness violence. The new police protocol is to notify automatically the

⁸² It is impossible to know why the children were removed from their mother's care as Sally's narrative is based solely on what she heard and saw. It is only speculation (on Sally's part and mine) that the children were removed because Tracey had been unable to control her ex-partner's behaviour.

Department for Community Development (DCD) when they attend an incident of domestic assault where children either are present or normally reside in the home. DCD sends a letter and brochure to the mother of the children involved unless the notification is considered to have the status of a Child Concern Report; that is if the police have attended the house several times, charges have been laid and/or the children are deemed at obvious risk. In this case, DCD officers visit the home and investigate. The referral is upgraded to an investigation for a Child Maltreatment Allegation if the police report that a child was injured during the incident (personal communication, J. Hooper, December 16, 2004).

By what mechanisms of power?

The mechanisms of power which operate through the discursive practices of a modernist, Western patriarchal culture ensure that certain interests are privileged and others subjugated when we respond to domestic violence in the ways we do. In this section, I explore some of the mechanisms of power and present them as ecologically nested, beginning with ideas located in a macrosystemic layer of philosophical and cultural values (the valorisation of modernity); moving to a mesosystemic layer (the state and academia); and through to a microsystemic layer of couple and familial relationships.

The valorisation of modernity

The valorisation of modernity by service providers, policy makers and politicians acts as a mechanism of power to influence how domestic violence is understood and responses to it are constructed and enacted. Smart (cited in Rolfe, 2000) offers a comprehensive description of modernity:

The question of modernity and its consequences is effectively a question of the post-enlightenment development of Western civilization and the rationalizing project with which it has been articulated. Since the eighteenth century there has been a prominent assumption that increasing rationality is conducive to the promotion of order and control, achievement of enhanced levels of social understanding, moral progress, justice, and human happiness. The pursuit of

order, promotion of calculability, fabrication and celebration of the 'new', and faith in 'progress' have been identified as pivotal features of modernity. (p. 8)

There are a number of ways in which the valorisation of modernity has contributed to some of the narrow and totalising understandings around domestic violence identified earlier in this chapter.

Foundationalist thought

Foundationalism describes the dominant tradition of thought in Western culture which "assumes objectivity, essentialism, and representationalism" (White, 1992b, p. 35).

According to Rosenau (1992), modernity, with its Enlightenment heritage "urges the social sciences in a positivist direction" with a foundational belief that objective facts and essential truths accurately can represent and predict people's experiences of the social world (p. 5). Positivist social science is supported by a functional rationality which, according to Lambkin (1998), exhibits itself through:

an obsession with certainty, with absolute answers, with simplification (where in reality there is great complexity), and with the need to remove uncertainty. (p. 7)

As a consequence, interventions based on predictable outcomes are expected to solve complex problems while the contestations which arise through competing political and ethical claims are subsumed (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). The deeper questions about why we might be doing certain kinds of social research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) largely go unasked in the academic world. For Card (2002), in relation to domestic violence research, this has resulted in a research focus which has not been particularly useful to the women who experience the atrocities:

Empirical approaches to terrorism in the home study the formation of violent dispositions and develop biological, psychological, and sociological theories of human nature and development. My philosophical approach inquires, rather, into the ethics of access, questioning the wisdom of protecting opportunities for those with violent dispositions to act them out. The challenge in this case is to design social practices so as to enable victims to protect themselves (or, if necessary, be protected) and defend themselves (or, if necessary, be defended) adequately. (p. 146)

The use of hierarchical binary oppositions

What are binary oppositions? They are a way of seeing, rather like ideologies. We know that ideologies draw sharp distinctions between conceptual opposites such as truth and falsity, meaning and nonsense, centre and periphery. Derrida suggests that we should try to break down the oppositions by which we are accustomed to think. (Sarap, 1993, p. 38)

According to Weedon (1992, p. 102), Derrida argued that not only do we structure language and meaning in terms of binary oppositions, but these oppositions are hierarchically arranged so that one item in the binary is always deemed superior to the other:

Within the familiar philosophical oppositions there is always a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other, holds the superior position. The first move in deconstructing the opposition is to overthrow the hierarchy. In the next phase this reversal must be displaced, the winning term put 'under erasure'. (Sarap, 1993, p. 51)

Derrida's notion of hierarchical binaries and his strategies for deconstruction have been particularly useful tools for feminists to challenge fixed constructions of gender. However, new ways of seeing and new constructions of meaning can entrench new hierarchical binaries which can become as totalising and oppressive as those they seek to displace (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2004).⁸³

Feminist theorising (within the context of modern Western ways of seeing and constructing meaning) has established hierarchical binaries as part of the discursive practices which construct domestic violence and determine normative responses. These binaries include: male/female; victim/perpetrator; violent/non-violent; oppressor/oppressed; formal/informal; professional/untrained; stay/leave; helper/help-seeker. The *superior* terms within the binaries come together to construct a picture of domestic violence which can be totalising and certain, such as: *Female victims of violence are oppressed. They are best helped to leave violent relationships by formal*

⁸³ An effect of binary thinking on my own theorising and work is that I find it difficult to write sympathetically about men who use violence without feeling disloyal to their current or former partners.

services staffed by professionals. This dominant narrative of domestic violence leaves little or no room for alternative constructions such as: *Female perpetrators of violence act to resist oppression. They can be helped by informal, untrained members of their family or social network to stay with their partners.*⁸⁴ Thus, Eileen's account of her assault on her husband showed how the dominant story of domestic violence can be unsettled when just one of the hierarchical binaries are reversed; in this case when it is the woman who has used violence in the relationship:

Eileen: *And I had days where I got him. One day - so, I suppose that's domestic violence - that day, I lost it. I'd just had enough. ... Everyone had been around for a few drinks and he got drunk. And this guy had lent us this motorbike. It was a brand-new motorbike. And Steve said he was going riding and I said no. Not on that, you're drunk. He came home with his pants all ripped, his arm was all ripped. He had gravel rash everywhere. And I just thought, nup. And I went and he bolted. ... Bolted because I just looked and he knew. And he sort of went home. Then I walked round the back - and I looked at the bike and [he'd wrecked it]. And 'cause we didn't have the money - you know. And I walked inside and he was drinking again and I thought stuff it. Took a can of beer and poured it over his head and bashed his head through the fibro wall, literally, but I just couldn't ... I just lost it. Wouldn't take him up [to the hospital]. I wouldn't go near him. He laid on the bed. He probably should have gone to the doctor's. Probably should have gone up the hospital and got seen to. I just left him lying there - he laid there for a week.*

Hierarchical binaries shelter us from contradiction and paradox. They make it possible to see the world as ordered and order/able. However, Nast and Pile (1998), referring to Grosz, have noted that while the binary notion of male and female bodies may have helped women in some areas, it “has also perpetuated a particular kind of understanding of the relationship between men and women: they are opposite, opposed” (p. 4). New responses to domestic violence may need to emerge from a more troubled understanding of what it means to be male and female. Grosz's suggestion that we think of the sexes as ‘neighbours’ rather than opposites (in Nast & Pile, 1998), unsettles the oppositional

⁸⁴ This process of deconstruction hardly would overturn a violent hierarchy. However, it might begin to unsettle the hierarchical binaries in order to create some spaces for more flexible constructions of the problem of domestic violence and possible responses to it.

nature of the binary and makes room for sex/gender constructions which are neither male nor female.⁸⁵

The control of [identity] categories

One of the ways in which modern, technical and rational societies address social problems is through the management of categories. Ideas and labels such as poverty (and the poor), unemployment (and the unemployed) and domestic violence (and survivor/victims) form categories and hierarchies of concern which then become the object of attention by the state (Becker & Scheff, cited in Manning, 1985). People within the categories of need (for example, the poor, homeless, women) may adopt or create a label for themselves in order to establish an identity politic, particularly if it is useful to improve their situation or circumstances (M. Smith & Katz, 1992). The issue of marginalised or disadvantaged people adopting an identity category (such as victim) so they can engage with an identity politic, is complicated (K. Healy, 2000). However, the choice about whether or not to adopt a political identity is not always left to the individual concerned. Identities can be (and often are) ascribed rather than taken. Hacking (1999) has used the term 'interactive kinds' to explore the way in which, once classified and labelled, people find themselves involved with institutions and practices, which like them, ascribe taken-for-granted meanings to the label:

Here I am concerned with kinds of people, their behavior, and their experiences involving action, awareness, agency, and self-awareness. The awareness may be personal, but more commonly is an awareness shared and developed within a group of people, embedded in practices and institutions to which they are assigned by virtue of the way in which they are classified. (p. 104)

One of the mechanisms of power used by those who gain from the dominant discursive practices around domestic violence is the co-optation of identity categories for the

⁸⁵ This is particularly relevant now, when radical feminist theorising about domestic violence is being challenged by the knowledge that violence also occurs in lesbian relationships (Dutton, 1998; Eaton, 1994). A less rigid construction of male/female bodies as binary could accommodate this knowledge and create the space for theorising about domination and oppression *beyond* sexed bodies.

purposes of research, training, policy making and practice. For example, as Rossiter (2000) notes in relation to social work:

It is clear that the grand narratives of social work install 'the client' as a project of middle-class white imagination while simultaneously eliminating difference through recourse to values concerning universal human subjects. (p. 35)

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. The history of the refuge movement for example, illustrates how claiming the identity category of 'victim of domestic violence' predominantly has been useful for women escaping violence by generating a totalising image of blameless, deserving women in need. This process has been instrumental in Australia and other Western countries in securing government funding for refuges. However, there is a cost for victim/survivors if they find themselves interacting with a label (or 'kind') which requires them to be passive, helpless and blameless in order to be considered as deserving (Chung, 2001/2002). As C. Fisher (2000) observed in her study, access to the law and certain rights "can be claimed only if the claimant fits the category of persons to whom the rights have been conceded by the state" (p. 27).

One of the difficulties involved in bringing informal helping into the discursive realm of helping and help-seeking in relation to domestic violence, has been the lack of an appropriate and agreed identity category for those who provide informal help and support. For example, in 2003, a local newspaper reported the case of Helen Browne who had provided support and accommodation for three months to a young, pregnant woman (a friend of a friend) who was escaping domestic violence. Mrs Browne had sought financial assistance from the Department for Community Development (DCD) because providing support to the young woman had been costly to her in terms of time and money. Mrs Browne described herself as a 'pastoral care volunteer'. She had created an identity category for people who volunteer on behalf of the wider community to assist people in need. However, as the story suggests, this identity category was not acceptable to the department. The view expressed on behalf of DCD was that Mrs Browne had volunteered on her own behalf and they described the situation as a 'private matter between Mrs Browne and the woman' (Pearce, 2003, p. 3). The outcome of this contestation over identity was a gain for the professionals (who kept their helping distinct from the informal, untrained helping of Mrs Browne) and a loss for Mrs Browne

as a lay helper who was \$1500 'out of pocket' as a result of the intensive support she had provided to the young woman.

The categorisation and labelling of helper and help-seeker not only makes the role of helper superior, it also establishes a hidden binary, whereby the helper is by definition, someone untainted by violence, unlike the help-seeker. Thus, helpers (researchers, policy makers, social workers) are permitted to see domestic violence as a problem for 'those people out there' who are seeking help, but never for themselves or their like. In a similar way, Kappeler (1995) has critiqued:

the mainstream division of society into so-called marginal groups - the classic clienteles of social work and care politics (and of police repression) - and an implied 'centre' to which all the speakers, explainers, researchers and carers themselves belong, and which we are to assume to be a zone of non-violence. (p. 5)

At the level of policy formation in Western Australia, the state has been keen to categorise and separate Indigenous family violence (which locates the cause of family violence in historical patterns of colonisation and oppression) (Blagg, 2000) from domestic violence (where the cause is black boxed as power and control). This separation appropriately responds to concerns expressed by Indigenous people that their experiences with family violence are different to those of non-Indigenous people, and it responds to the aspirations of Indigenous people for culturally appropriate services. However, the separation also, potentially colludes with a dominant state-endorsed agenda to marginalise and silence macrosystemic analyses of violence which link domestic violence to the history and normative practices of the *non-Indigenous* colonising culture. Thus, separating Indigenous family violence from non-Indigenous experiences of domestic violence ensures that the critical theorising which connects and opposes *all* forms of oppression (Bishop, 2002; hooks, 1993, 2000b, 2000c; Pettman, 1992) remains subjugated. Thus, the co-optation, use and control of categories of need and identity become powerful mechanisms for the control of the discursive practices around domestic violence and domestic violence intervention.

Instrumental-bureaucratic rationality

Post-modernists criticize all that modernity has engendered: the accumulated experience of Western civilization, industrialization, urbanization, advanced technology, the nation state, life in the 'fast lane'. They challenge modern priorities: career, office, individual responsibility, bureaucracy, liberal democracy, tolerance, humanism, egalitarianism, detach experiment, evaluative criteria, neutral procedures, impersonal rules and rationality. (Rosenau, 1992, p. 5)

However, to criticise or challenge is not necessarily to reject. While some postmodern theorists argue "that modernity is no longer a force of liberation; it is rather a source of subjugation, oppression, and repression" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 6), these ideas can caution against the excesses of modernity without demanding a rejection of all things modern. Foucault (1984), for example, was not anti-reason. Rather, he cautioned against the careless use of reason and so in this sense, rejected a simplistic rationality/irrationality dichotomy:

I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century has always been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question: *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers? One should remain as close to this question as possible, keeping in mind that it is both central and extremely difficult to resolve. In addition, if it is extremely dangerous to say that Reason is the enemy that should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality. If intellectuals in general are to have a function, if critical thought itself has a function, and, even more specifically, if philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers. (Foucault, 1984, p. 294)

Poststructural feminists (and their supporters) understand rationality as the privileging of the rational mind in the hierarchical binary of rational mind/irrational body (G. Smith, 1992; Weedon, 1992). This rationality is associated with science, technology and order; mechanisms which have become effective tools for the patriarchal control of (mainly) women's bodies (Sawicki, 1991). However, critical theorists who can tolerate postmodern theorising have sought to expand Foucault's line of argument that critiquing rationality doesn't necessarily mean abandoning rationality (and with it some of the

Enlightenment ideals of freedom and justice). Rather, for them, there is a need to be cautious about how ideas of freedom and justice are used, avoiding universals and imperatives in case they too become totalising and oppressive (Lather, 1991, 1992).

One way to do this, has been to juxtapose two different kinds of rationality: *functional* (instrumental, technical, bureaucratic) rationality with *substantial* (or value) rationality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Lambkin (1998) has drawn on the distinction between functional and substantial rationality, showing how:

‘functional’ (instrumental-bureaucratic) rationality [is] where people are expected to fit into a predetermined mechanical design, and ‘substantial’ rationality [is] where people use intelligent insight to challenge and question the system of relationships of which they are part.⁸⁶ (p. 8)

According to Lambkin (1998), who has drawn on the ideas of Saul (1997), instrumental-bureaucratic rationality translates into a dysfunctional corporatist world fixated with ‘rationally organised expertise’, ‘servility to intricate structures, systems and processes’ and ‘arcane technical dialects’ (p. 7).

In Western Australia, instrumental-bureaucratic rationalism has become embedded in the language and frameworks of key agencies involved in responding to domestic violence. For example, the Western Australian Police Force, in response to the Ombudsman’s report (O’Donnell, 2003), describes its organisational structure for responding to child abuse and family violence using ‘arcane technical dialects’ in text such as this:

CIIS Portfolio has established a framework for statewide command and control with the peak responsibilities being assigned to the MCD and the management of the operation response to be co-located with the CAIU. This framework includes:

⁸⁶ Ferguson (cited in Brown, 1992) has made a similar distinction between types of rationality. The notion of substantial rationality has much in common with reflective practice which involves reasoned, structured thought about practice, power and relationships (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001).

- Appointment of a State Coordinator for family violence to quality control the regional and district Child Protection and Family Violence Officers, coordinate training, policy and integration matters.
- Use and comparative analysis of Performance Indicators through Business Plan and Organisational Performance Reporting. (WAPS, 2003, p. 2)

Domestic violence policy making and implementation are embedded firmly within a technical, rational, bureaucratic framework in Western Australia, where there has been a substantial focus on research and documentation about a universal definition, best practice models, competency standards, agency agreements, outcome-based program evaluations, a statewide data collection system and marketing campaigns. However, as Freire (1972) warned, if the goal is liberation from oppression, then this level of bureaucracy is not necessarily a good thing, because we understand freedom from oppression to be revolutionary and emancipatory:

the moment the new regime hardens into a dominating 'bureaucracy' the humanist dimension of the struggle is lost and it is no longer possible to speak of liberation. (p. 33)

The following description of the Family and Domestic Violence Unit's (FDVU) role in responding to domestic violence in Western Australia further suggests the extent to which state agencies seek to rigidly control service responses through rationality and bureaucratisation. This is done firstly through the provision of narrowly defined programs (rather than workers responding flexibly in an alliance with individuals, other agencies and communities) and then prescriptions about who can deliver programs and how they will be supervised and monitored. Through these processes, the state appears to mirror the strategies of rigidity and control evident in many patriarchal nuclear families:

The FDVU's objective is to facilitate a coordinated and integrated response to family and domestic violence across Western Australia, and in doing so **manage** the Family and Domestic Violence State Strategic Plan. As part of this role the FDVU produce best practice manuals that work as guiding principles for the provision of programs for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in Western Australia. These manuals **stress that programs must have** as a primary objective the safety of victims of domestic violence. They state what content

programs **should** contain, **the required qualifications** of staff or volunteers providing the programs, supervision standards and support **that is required** for staff and the principles of evaluation of these programs [emphasis added]. (Arem & Palamara, 2003, p. 16)

Finally, Schon (1995) has explained how instrumental-bureaucratic rationality (with its inherent assumptions about knowledge, truth and certainty), subjugates quality professional practice:

By defining rigor in terms of technical rationality alone, we exclude, as *nonrigorous*, much of what competent practitioners actually do in the indeterminate zones of practice where they confront problematic situations, unique cases, and conflicts of values or objectives - we exclude the artistry they sometimes bring to technical problem solving and the judgments on which it depends. Indeed, the schema of technical rationality excludes the most important components of competent practice. (p. 34)

For example, agencies responding to domestic violence in Western Australia have been encouraged to undertake *agency agreement projects* whereby relevant agencies devise complex protocols and guidelines for joint interaction and case management of domestic violence *clients*. In the case of the Pilbara Regional Domestic Violence Council (servicing a regional population of 40,000 people), this is a 47-page document which repeats that for each agency, the purpose of the agreement is to do such things as ‘enhance client outcomes’, ‘improve service delivery’, ‘enhance interagency relationships’, ‘establish duty of care’ and ‘establish clear guidelines and responsibilities’. All of these activities are standard professional practice and while the document contains some useful information about individual agencies’ structure and mandate, it is not obvious how it facilitates good practice in terms of working with the complexity of family violence.

The teleological imperative of modernism

Progress is a temporal concept; a modernist metanarrative which underpins the drive towards a successful end point in much of our theorising and practice. Postmodernism on the other hand, challenges the idea that progress is ‘possible, probable or necessary’ (Lyotard, 1989, p. 8). As Foucault (1984) and others have noted, the belief that our actions are destined to take us to some ideal end point in history is predominantly a

feature of a post-Enlightenment culture which leads to an obsessive interest in new and progressive ideas and theories. Foucault referred to the way in which modernity 'heroizes' the present such that "modernity is the attitude that makes it possible to grasp the 'heroic' aspect of the present time" (1984, p. 40). For Latour (cited in Kendall & Wickham, 1999), this attitude towards temporality, in particular a privileging of the present, encourages thinking which is revolutionary so that "this is the only way the moderns can conceptualise history – as revolutions" (p. 87). This imperative is particularly evident in academic work where the latest journals, books and theories are considered to be better than the preceding ones because notions such as knowledge *building* and *acquisition* dominate. As Barrett and Phillips (1992) have noted:

We should certainly reject the simplistic teleology of assuming that later theory is therefore better theory, and that the best theory of all is the position from which we happen at the moment to be speaking. This model of theoretical progress, strongly influenced by a Marxist concept of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, is quintessentially nineteenth-century and modernist, and is one of which we will do well to be suspicious. (p. 7)

This teleological world view has influenced the way in which politicians, policy makers, academics and practitioners respond to social problems. The teleological imperative is critiqued implicitly in Lambkin's (1998) interpretation of Saul's (1997) view of corporatism, an ideology which, at a day-to-day practice level, feeds the drive *ever upwards and onwards* to locate the single answer to the problem being confronted. This manifests itself as:

The denial of history – successive absolute answers are provided for major public problems without reference to previous experience. ... [and] ... an obsession with haste (in reality as a means of control and power) – problems need solving through efficiently rational processes, without the need for considered reflection by society at large. (Lambkin, 1998, p. 6-7)

One illustration of the modern obsession with temporality and progress in relation to responding to domestic violence, has been the use of the victim to survivor journey metaphor. This temporal metaphor combines an image of progress with one of emancipation and is implicit in discourses of responding to domestic violence: victims *become* survivors through a process of intervention by helping professionals and being a

survivor means no longer being subjected to the list of behaviours which define domestic violence. However, the journey for most women, if it happens at all, is much more complicated than the metaphor allows. The journey usually happens across time *and* space and involves much more than a shift in identity from someone who has certain behaviours perpetrated against them to someone who has survived those behaviours. However, use of the metaphor persists and constructs an idealised end point for victims of violence.

Thus, the valorisation of modernity supports a range of discursive practices which act in support of those who gain when we respond to domestic violence in the ways we do. Contemporary, state-sponsored response are underpinned by foundationalist thought, the use of hierarchical binary oppositions, the control of categories and labels, instrumental-bureaucratic rationality and a teleological imperative which promises an eventual resolution to the problem of domestic violence through new and better research, policies and procedures.

The patriarchal neo-liberal state

According to Kenny (1994), although critical theorists lean towards a Marxist instrumental view of the state, for many feminists, particularly those informed by PM/PS, theories of the state may be irrelevant:

Within feminist theory and empirical research, categories other than 'the state' emerge as more vibrant and significant. These include 'policing', 'law' and 'legal culture', 'medical culture', 'bureaucratic culture', 'organized crime', 'fraternalism', 'paternalism', 'misogyny', 'subjectivity', 'the body', 'sexuality', 'men', 'masculinity', 'violence', 'culture', 'power' and 'pleasure'. (Allen, cited in Kenny, 1994, p. 92)

However, for a number of other feminist scholars (Bacchi, 1999; Daniels, 1999a; C MacKinnon, 1989; Weeks, 1995; Yeatman, 1998), a feminist theorising of the state is crucial. For Brown (1992), feminist theorising exposes the different ways in which state power/s are enacted through 'the man in the state'.

Earlier, I noted the concerns of pro-feminist activists and practitioners, that the state has co-opted the issue of domestic violence, controlling how the issue publicly is understood, talked about and responded to (Grant, 1998; Weeks, 2000; Woodhead, Weatherill, Reid Boyd, Hopkins, & Murray, 2001/2002). If this has happened, should we be surprised? Critical victimologists Mawby and Walklate (1994) refer to MacKinnon's (1989) critique of the state's new-found interest in women's issues such as domestic violence and rape. Noting, for example, that little has changed in terms of the effectiveness of the police response to domestic violence in the UK, they have suggested that:

the ideological mechanism underpinning what appears to be a progressive acceptance by the state of the needs and rights of women may not always be progressive in their consequences. This statement implies that the voice of the feminist movement may be marginalized and compromised; and that the real motivation may be other than a concern with women's issues per se, which presents the possibility that the state will not actually deliver the appropriate goods. In other words the kind of state under discussion is a patriarchal state. (p. 184)

Brown (1992) has avoided imbuing the state with a totalising, all-controlling power and like other poststructural feminists, recognises the paradoxes inherent in the postmodern state. For example, she argues that the "contemporary U.S. state is now both modern and postmodern, highly concrete and an elaborate fiction; powerful and intangible; rigid and protean; potent and boundaryless; centralizing and decentered; without agency, eschewing personification, yet capable of tremendous economic, political, and ecological effects" (p. 12). She has focused on the various apparatus of the state and civil society, and reflects on the complex and competing ways in which power is exercised. In this section, I describe processes whereby state-sponsored/sanctioned institutions act as conduits of power in relation to how we respond to domestic violence.

Corporatism and domestic violence: Reflecting on PADV

For Saul (1997), corporatism is an ideology (powerful across most contemporary Western societies and actively seeking to transmogrify others), whereby the idea of the citizen is corrupted and replaced by the idea of the self-interested employee/consumer.

In this document, I describe how a corporatist ideology permeated the Federal Government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) program, whereby the Office of the Status of Women (the public sector organisation which acted as the secretariat to the PADV) was made over to the image of a commercial company in order to supply products to consumers.

As noted earlier, PADV was the Federal Government's flagship program for responding to domestic violence. It had bipartisan support in the Federal Parliament as well as support from the state and territory governments (Office of the Status of Women, 2001; Summers, 2003). In this section, I draw on extracts from my research journal to suggest how corporatism as an element of the modern, neo-liberal state has been absorbed into (and exudes from) PADV as a government response to domestic violence.

March 30, 2000

I'm in Albany for the PADV Showcase. When I walk into the room I am confronted with rows upon rows of products – books, reports, brochures, videos, toolkits, monogrammed pens, stationery and paper clips. The trestle is bowing. My overwhelming sense is one of going shopping. I have been reading Luke (1991) on hyperreality and the role of consumption in late capitalist societies:

As part of the production of demand, the forms and substance of society itself are manufactured to sustain consumption. Consequently, every dimension of social existence today is essentially a complex simulation of reality, designed specifically to sustain the fragile cycles of political, economic and cultural reproduction. Since individual desires are abstractly autonomized into pre-packaged needs that serve as productive forces, the social devolves into an aggregate of atomized individuals, whose role is to mediate the packaged meaning of their desires in the corporate marketplace. The traditional cultural forms of attaining both individuality and the social collapse under these conditions. (Luke, 1991, p. 6)

Some of the presentations are good and I feel as though I have caught up with Federal Government responses in relation to domestic violence. Some of the packaged material is good - creative ideas about community education about violence and non-violence

(eg. healthy relationships). But most of what is on offer is of the Thingz⁸⁷ variety – presented enticingly, responding to a manufactured desire but without much substance; the research products tell a story but there is little analysis and no offers of ongoing funding so we can apply the ideas in our community.

There are two concurrent presentations – one on a young women’s project on healthy relationships and one on peer mentoring for young men. The women worked unpaid on their project. The peer mentors (all young men) were paid. How does a program on domestic violence replicate the gendered relationships implicit in domestic violence? How does it not?

On the way home we stop at the roadhouse in Kojonup. There is a poster for the Mallee Root B&S Ball in the window. The caption is “How many roots can you get in your ute?”⁸⁸ We are gobsmacked.

December 11, 2001

I am at the PADV Across the Lifespan Conference in Perth and there are more packaged goods available. One of the main issues that comes up in workshops is that PADV funds pilot innovative projects but there is no money for the long term. Projects get up and then have to fold when the money runs out. But there will be money in the grant for an evaluation and maybe even a booklet about the project. How many booklets do I need? I can see the extent to which the state has co-opted and commodified domestic violence and put it out there in the corporate marketplace – huge sums of money spent on private research consultancies and the printing and distribution of products. Like the Freedom from Fear campaign with its emphasis on marketing and the mass media (consultants, advertising, publications), it looks good and who would complain? They are at least doing something about domestic violence. We should be thankful.

The materiality of state power: Funding for women’s services

Discussing agency, Davies (1991) noted that there is more to power than discourse.

There is a materiality to power and agency which can be overlooked by PM/PS theorising when it only attends to language. In the context of the neo-liberal state’s response to domestic violence, this is apparent in the materiality of power which accrues

⁸⁷ Thingz is a franchised gift shop operating across Australia.

⁸⁸ Mallee roots are a popular firewood in Australia and *root* is a slang term for sexual intercourse. A *ute* is an utility vehicle. Bachelor and Spinster (B&S) balls have become a tradition in some parts of rural Australia.

to the state through the control of funding for women's services such as refuges and crisis centres.

According to Grant (1998), state funding of women's refuges began the process by which radical feminists lost ownership of the issue of domestic violence; something Tierney predicted more than 20 years ago would happen in the United States:

The trend toward conventional, social-service oriented programs that is already evident will continue, and the emphasis on feminist concerns will decline. Influential sponsors, including federal law enforcement and social welfare agencies, have directed the movement away from 'radical' programs that challenge society's patriarchal values and advocate large-scale social change. (Tierney, 1982, p. 216)

Similarly, in Britain, J. Healy (1984) predicted the co-optation of the issue of domestic violence by social service agencies or the 'welfare bureaucracy' as a consequence of professionalisation of services and funding.⁸⁹ Thus, concerns about co-optation and bureaucratisation of the issue of domestic violence have been expressed by victim advocates across a number of Western countries for some time.

In Western Australia, Woodhead, Weatherill, Reid Boyd, Hopkins and Murray (2001/2002) note the dilemmas experienced by feminist service providers in maintaining their autonomy once they become dependent on government funding:

On the one hand, the state holds the legal monopoly over both the regulation of violence of its citizens, and has accepted responsibility for funding of services for victims of interpersonal violence; but, on the other hand, such engagement with the funding and provision of services increases the power of the state to determine the parameters of its involvement, frequently leaving agencies and workers feeling vulnerable to its whims. (p. 17)

⁸⁹ Brown (1992) identified bureaucracy as one of four 'modalities of state power'; the others being liberalism, capitalism and prerogative. The latter she defined as 'that which marks the state as a state' including activities in the name of national security (p. 13).

The authors also note how increased state involvement with domestic violence services, particularly refuges, has seen an increase in the professionalisation of the staff of women's services which were once managed and staffed by activists. In addition, state bureaucrats have expressed an explicit preference for hierarchical management structures in refuges, which have compromised activist principles of collectivised management (Murray, 2002; Woodhead et al., 2001/2002).

Thus, at a mesosystemic level, the patriarchal, neo-liberal state colludes with the interests of those who gain from contemporary responses to domestic violence, through a hegemonic, corporatist ideology, and the power and control which emanates from funding contracts with activist organisations.

Academia and disciplinary discourses

Agger (1990) used the word *discourse* to refer to speech and conversation which is 'dialogical public speech' or at least the language which makes this possible (p. 37). He bemoans the loss of this kind of discourse in academic writing, suggesting that instead of academics using their knowledge and ideas to 'plumb the social world', they communicate with one another through esoteric journals and books. As a consequence, much academic writing "fails to invite dialogue, instead reporting itself as an objective account purged of authorial intentionality, perspective, passion" (p. 37). An effect of this, in the context of academic disciplines, is to 'discipline the disciplines' so that ideas which stray too far from the accepted wisdom of the discipline are squashed before they can develop. According to Agger:

Disciplines that reproduce themselves also reproduce the social order to which they are attached through the relationship among higher education, the state and economy. In particular, disciplines reproduce *disciplinary discourse*, the peculiarly private argots of academics constrained by the prevailing 'literatures' in their fields. Thus, if nothing else, editors, by screening out certain types of work, add value to the prevailing discourses in which disciplined professionals compose their work. (1990, p. 134)

In addition, according to Fraser (1989), another consequence of a restricted public discourse, is the perpetuation of discourses which subordinate women:

If wife battering ... is enclaved as a 'personal' or 'domestic' matter within male-headed restricted families and if public discourse about this phenomenon is canalized into specialized publics associated with, say, family law, social work, and the sociology and psychology of 'deviancy,' then this serves to reproduce gender dominance and subordination. (p. 168)

There are powerful cultures operating within academic disciplines which make it difficult (and/or risky) for academics and practitioners to stray outside the boundaries set by the discipline powerbrokers. Explanations of domestic violence which stray beyond (or worse still, challenge) the accepted truth statements discovered by the application of traditional foundationalist thought risk rejection or ridicule. Thus, the works of radical feminists (Brodribb, 1992; Daly, 1979) or ecofeminist theorists (hooks, 1984, 1990; 2000b; Merchant, 1992; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Starhawk, 2002) are rarely represented in the journals of practice disciplines such as social work or in policy documents dealing with domestic violence. Gergen (2001) cites Fine and Gordon to explain how this has worked in the discipline of psychology:

"If you're married and want to stay that way, you learn to keep your mouth shut." With relatively few exceptions, feminists have learned this lesson in their marriage with the discipline of psychology. Feminist psychology itself tends problematically to reproduce the individualism and conservatism of the larger discipline. (p. 16)

For psychology and social work, there also has been the need to avoid the issue of domestic violence being reclaimed by psychiatry with its focus on individual pathology. Prior to the 1970s, psychiatry was the main discipline involved in the treatment of *marital conflict* and the tendency was to focus on women's predisposition to victimhood (see, for example, Snell et al., 1964). *Handing back* any credibility or status to psychiatry to explain and intervene where there is domestic violence by acknowledging the role of psychopathology in some situations where there is domestic violence, could undermine disciplines like social work which have now laid claim to a substantial piece of the academic *real estate* through their involvement with the issue.

The discourse of coupledness

Card (2002) argues for a return of the word *evil* to describe “foreseeable intolerable harms produced by culpable wrongdoing” (p. 3). She notes how talk of evil has become unpopular, but suggests that when it is applied to deeds and harm done (rather than to people), it can be a particularly useful term. Card (2002) writes:

'Evil' may seldom mark monsters. But it often enough marks monstrous deeds, wrongs that deserve priority of attention from political resistance movements, such as feminism and antiracism. (p. 23)

Card comes to this view after proposing, as an example, that contemporary marriage and divorce laws can be constructed as evil as the harm they can do to women and children is foreseeable and intolerable. Marriage is evil, Card suggests, because:

Trapping victims in enforced cohabitation with perpetrators who have the power to prevent access by potential witnesses and rescuers, these institutions facilitate the perpetration and cover-up of severe and prolonged child abuse, as well as severe and prolonged partner rape and battering. (2002, p. 25)

Here Card provides a powerful counter-hegemonic discourse to the discourse of coupledness which dominates much of contemporary Western society. In this section, I am suggesting that the discourse of coupledness acts as a mechanism of power which limits the possibilities for responding more effectively to domestic violence because of the inscriptions of intimacy and privacy.

Gubrium and Holstein (2000) suggest that discourse is ideas, ideologies, and symbolic formations as much as it is “also working attitudes, modes of address, terms of reference, and courses of action suffused into social practices” (pp. 493-494). Thus, discourse is (among other things) ideology spoken or enacted into existence. For critical and feminist theorists, the ideology of couple and family underpins patriarchy and therefore is an appropriate subject of critique. For example, Leonard (1984, cited in Leonard, 1997), described the ideology of familism as “a celebration of the virtues of the nuclear family, the nurturing roles of women, the subordination of children and other requirements of the social order” (p. 38). However, in this thesis document, I am inclined to be protective of the word *family* for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the participants in the study rarely were critical of their families and for most of them, their children and their family of origin, were a source of comfort and support. From my interpretation of the narratives, women sought to escape from partners and the couple relationship rather than their families. Secondly, the notion of family needs to be defended from the conservative and Christian fundamentalist interpretations which present it solely as the heterosexual, two-parent family subscribing to 'family values'.⁹⁰ If we want to re/claim the term family to reflect relationships of connectedness and interdependency, rather than simply a set of conservative social values, then it may need to be treated gently. Finally, I have my own positive experiences of family life and so I am nervous about critical generalisations and totalising ideas. According to Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 77), women may experience the family as oppressive and liberating at the same time. This view is shared by Black women writers such as hooks (1990) and Huggins (1998) who have recognised the positive aspects of family and family life for Black women.

However, I have not felt the need to be as generous about the notion of coupledness as I have been about the notion of family. Following Card's (2002) lead, it seems to me that it is the discourse of coupledness it is wise to be worried about. According to Giddens (in Giddens & Pierson, 1998):

We take the world of coupledness for granted, but it is an extraordinary phenomenon. To be in a couple is to be in a relationship that creates its own history which is personalized and may have little connection with the wider society. The world of coupledness is exclusionary: it is the contemporary form of the [historic] division between the married and unmarried, but with quite a different character. (p. 138)

⁹⁰ At the federal election in Australia in 2004, a political party emerged with some electoral success, under the name of Family First. In Australia, as in the United States and elsewhere, 'family values' currently is code for conservative values and opposition to abortion, homosexuality and divorce (see for example Family First Party, n.d.).

In this section, I suggest that at a microsystemic level, a discourse of coupledness acts as a mechanism of power by which patriarchal interests are maintained. A discourse of coupledness creates the social identity of the heterosexual couple and defines the power relationship between its members, particularly if the couple marry.⁹¹ It does this through a representation of coupledness as taken for granted and ideal.

Coupledness as taken-for-granted

In contemporary Australian culture, coupledness is taken for granted in a number of ways: in terms of its inevitability, durability, privacy and intimacy. There is a generalised but unspoken view that most people will become part of a couple at some stage/s in their life cycle. Formalising the couple relationship, particularly through marriage, generally signals a belief that the relationship will be enduring. Among the study participants, Carmel and Trish understood that when their fathers told them to *do something* about the violence, this meant that they were to find ways to make the marriage work despite the violence, not to end the marriage.

It also is taken for granted that coupledness, whether it is recognised as dating, a de facto marriage or a legal marriage, is a form of institutionalised privacy which locates the couple outside of the public scrutiny of the state (Schneider, 1994) and separate from other individuals and couples (Giddens, in Giddens & Pierson, 1998). Coupledness generally is recognised as a private, personal and social relationship rather than an economic or political one.⁹²

⁹¹ One of the reasons Card (2002) argues that marriage is evil, is to try and discourage gay people from pursuing the campaign for gay marriage rights.

⁹² However, as feminists have long argued, the couple is a political unit where gendered relations of power are prescribed and enacted. According to Giddens and Pierson (1998), in all cultures “the prime basis of marriage ... until recently was a matter of economics, inheritance and the formation of kinship alliances” (p. 137). While it is beyond my scope here to explore the antecedents to coupledness and its relationship to marriage, I suggest later in this section that marriage still is an economic relationship even if it is initiated and sustained (or not) within a discourse of romantic love.

During the interviews for this study, constructions of coupledness and the issue of the privacy of the couple and family surfaced regularly. For example, Barbara never considered having her husband charged for his violent and abusive behaviour because of *the fact that everyone would know, [it would be] in the paper*. MacKinnon (1987b) has made the following observation in relation to domestic privacy:

The very place (home, body), relations (sexual), activities (intercourse and reproduction), and feelings (intimacy, selfhood) that feminism finds central to women's subjection form the core of privacy doctrine. But when women are segregated in private, one at a time, a law of privacy will tend to protect the right of men "to be let alone," to oppress us one at a time. A law of the private, in a state that mirrors such a society, will translate the traditional values of the private sphere into individual women's right to privacy, subordinating women's collective needs to the imperatives of male supremacy. (p. 148)

Thus, according to MacKinnon, the privacy of coupledness makes women vulnerable to abuse because their rights to state protection in the home are ambiguous and the experience of shared intimacy with the perpetrator makes physical and emotional separation from him difficult. Borkowski et al. (1983) explored the issues of privacy and intimacy in their study on community responses to marital violence and concluded that:

The irony is that privacy contributes to, and reinforces, the intimacy and sense of solidarity in family life that society values, while it also nurtures and protects the very conditions in which conflict and violence develop. (p. 113)

One of the other taken-for-granted aspects of hegemonic coupledness is the tacit agreement between the parties that it is an economic relationship which has been entered into, one where the man has traded his protection and breadwinning skills for the woman's sexual, emotional and domestic service, even when the woman works outside the home (Burns, 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Tulloch, 1984). Among other things, the woman becomes responsible for meeting the needs of family members and for the functioning of the family even if she has limited power with which to ensure that functioning. However, the bargain is highly problematic for women, particularly if they are unable to envisage or enact an economic arrangement for themselves and their children outside the couple. In the study, several of the women who had lived in violent

relationships had been locked into coupledness because of the economic nature of gendered relationships. For example, Helen did not have recognised skills or qualifications to sell in the formal labour market. However, she worked unpaid as a labourer, housekeeper and bookkeeper, selling these skills in the informal labour market of coupledness. For Geraldine, there were strong economic ties to her partner and so leaving the relationship did not present itself easily as an option to her:

Geraldine: *We had everything planned. Our son, from a week's birth was booked into a private school. We had house plans drawn up. We were going to build a house on the hill in 20 years' time when the kids were teenagers. All those things. Business ventures we'd gone into with the bank. My whole life in every aspect was tied in with him. So there was just no way you could walk away from huge bank loans and business practices and kids being booked into a private school. I couldn't see a way out of it.*

The idea of coupledness

Coupledness *per se* and the nature of coupledness are not only taken for granted in most cultures, but in Western society it also is represented as ideal through several discourses which simultaneously portray it as an ideal (particularly to women) while ensnaring its members (particularly women) in potentially dangerous environments. For example, Christian-Smith (1988) referred to a discourse of romantic love which establishes 'home and hearth' as part of the teleos for women, so that young girls, through romance novels, are introduced to the notion of home as a place which is desirable but bounded and singular and where they need to be careful about how they represent and use power. She noted that:

Romance ultimately involves the construction of feminine identity in terms of others, with boys in the powerful position of giving girls' lives meaning. Girls may cajole and persuade. When they try to formally control their romances, their boyfriends leave. Since romance is ultimately about power, by having so many romances dissolve in the wake of girls' bids for power, these novels make a strong statement about the irreconcilability of feminine power and satisfying relationships with males. (p. 92)

Towns and Adams (2000) suggest it is a 'perfect love discourse' which idealises coupledness for women and acts as a mechanism of entrapment. They note that perfect

love is represented to women as love which is all-giving, nurturing and caring so that women's identity becomes linked to their ability to hold relationships together. When I interviewed the study participants, notions of family, home and couple were present and powerful in their narratives. For example, Barbara had felt compelled to stay with Tom for a number of reasons, but she also could see the wider social context of hegemonic coupledness playing itself out in their relationship:

Barbara: *But then, a lot of women, we are very conditioned in life to have this perfect life. Everyone has a partner and they are happy. And a lot of people can't cope on their own. It's like a status symbol. I've got a partner. I'm married. At a huge huge cost. But ... because they don't want to be seen as this woman who just is so useless that she can't even be married.*

Towns and Adams (2000) identify redemptive love as a component of the perfect-love discourse, one which is influenced by the Christian notion of love as sacrifice. Here, perfect love is represented as having the power to 'transform or redeem the loved one' (p. 572). During our first interview, Geraldine described how she enacted her beliefs about the sacrifices a *good* wife would make.

Geraldine: *It started out really simply as me just trying to build up his self-esteem. I could see he had a low self esteem so when he did something that I perceived as being good I would say Oh you're really good at this. You know. You're better than the last person at doing that. And then you add to that and add to that. And eventually you go from someone who has no self-esteem to someone who thinks that they are God himself and you end up punishing yourself to save them the trouble. Isn't that love?*

Thus, discourses of perfect love are likely to encourage women to stay with violent men during the contrition phase if there is a cycle of violence dynamic (Walker, 1979) because it can look as though the power of love is working to reform the perpetrator. Towns and Adams (2000) conclude that "there are multiple socially constructed depictions of love and of the identities of those in love that women must first resist if they are to leave a man who uses violence against them" (p. 579).

In this section, I have explored mechanisms of power which allow some individuals and groups to gain and others to lose when we respond to domestic violence in ways that collude with dominant macro, meso and micro level structures and cultural practices, which are suggested by a feminist ecological model for understanding domestic violence. At a macrosystemic level, where modernism is valorised, a range of structures and processes operate to limit opportunities for more creative responses to domestic violence. These include a commitment to foundationalist principles, the use of hierarchical binary oppositions, the control of [identity] categories, an embracing of instrumental-bureaucratic rationality and the taken-for-granted imperative of progress. At a meso-systemic level, the 'man in the [patriarchal neo-liberal] state' who Brown (1992) identified, is left largely unchallenged by the disciplining discourses of academia, as he neglects the interests of women and supports the interests of those already empowered. Finally, at the very personal level of the couple, the discourse of coupledness (in particular its inevitability and associations with the idea of romantic love) operates to entice and entrap women into potentially dangerous relationships.

Is it desirable to keep going this way in our responses to domestic violence?

Feminist and pro-feminist activists, academics, practitioners and policy makers in Australia and elsewhere have established and maintained some highly effective responses to domestic violence. Thirty years ago, there were no women's refuges, very few professionals had heard the term domestic violence and even fewer professionals had been trained in how to respond to the problem (Murray, 2002). Women often were blamed for their own abuse and staying in an abusive relationship was viewed as a form of masochism (Gayford, cited in K. Browne & Herbert, 1997). Causal explanations for domestic violence were located firmly within the psychological model of personality disorders and/or poor interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills.

While much has changed, much has not. Dominant discourses surrounding domestic violence reflect modernist, rational and progressive ideas, albeit ideas influenced by some feminist theorising. Public policy which considers domestic violence as a consequence of severe individual psychopathology is now studiously avoided (outside psychiatry where it remains unmediated by feminism), putting some women at risk of attack from partners and ex-partners who may require treatment, incarceration and/or banishment from their home state. A discourse of domestic violence as a consequence of a normative social system similarly is silenced. The seemingly preferred explanations for domestic violence (of inner tension, desire for instrumental power and learned behaviour) locate the problem predominantly within the individual, but leave the notion of instrumental power sufficiently ambiguous (or black boxed) as to be acceptable to feminist policy makers and practitioners because it can imply a structural explanation for the violence. Explanatory frameworks are still influenced by the notion of singularization so that much of the research and discussion focuses on locating a single causal factor to explain the phenomenon. Ecological models (which suggest that a person may be violent as a consequence of a range of factors spanning from the intrapsychic to the sociocultural) are rarely evident in lay or professional explanations.

Outside the provision of refuges and *community co-ordination*, formal, state-sponsored responses to domestic violence focus almost exclusively on the individual and are located predominantly within the criminal justice and health systems. Despite improvements in how these systems respond to domestic violence, there remain serious limitations (C. Fisher, 2000). In particular, the contrast between what the state says it will do in response to domestic violence (that is, enforce the legislation in relation to assaults and breaches of restraining orders), and the reality of the experience for many women is stark (Katzen & Kelly, 2000; O'Donnell, 2003).

Many prevention and intervention strategies in Australia are largely *symbolic* with little evidence that governments are willing to invest recurrent funds to prevent and intervene effectively where there is domestic violence. The Federal Government's PADV program has resulted in a plethora of publications as a result of surveys, evaluations, and well documented pilot projects. However, little additional money has been

allocated to the basic infrastructure needed to implement programs found to be effective (Summers, 2003). Most communities struggle to provide even the most basic services such as women's refuges, appropriately trained police and ongoing community education. For example, in South West Western Australia, the Regional Domestic Violence Co-ordinating Committee has funds to employ a worker for only 35 hours per fortnight to co-ordinate and support domestic violence services and community education programs across 16 local government areas.

The vulnerability of response mechanisms to co-optation by the state means that many of them may have reached the limit of their usefulness, particularly as they are enacted by governments wedded to neo-liberal economic policies which are marked by a reduced commitment to public expenditure. The shift in Western countries towards more conservative social and economic policies means that some response structures are funded inadequately and their long-term future is precarious. On the issue of social policy and domestic violence, Weeks (2000) has expressed her concern in relation to:

the narrowing of the debate in a policy context, where rhetoric about family responsibility has become a prime focus. As part of the family focus, the need for more 'help' for men and children has come to the forefront, while women's experiences are in danger of a return to invisibility, in what can be called a hierarchy of needs. A 'law and order' approach to crime has become the centrepiece of anti-violence policy, and violence by women has become a matter of some public interest. A revival of pathologising women and women-blaming is again on the horizon as social problems are individualised and viewed as matters of individual mental health. (p. 274)

The fourth *phronetic* question asks if it is desirable to keep going this way in our responses to domestic violence. The interpretations of the various texts collected for this study suggest that it is not. More of the same, in terms of responding to domestic violence, is unlikely to take us in the direction we need to go. To reiterate Card's (2002) position:

The challenge is ... to design social practices so as to enable victims to protect themselves (or, if necessary, be protected) and defend themselves (or, if necessary, be defended) adequately. (p. 146)

We may want to add to that, the challenge of designing social practices to enable perpetrators of violence to constitute and perform themselves as non-violent.

Chapter coda

This chapter has been framed around questions developed from Flyvbjerg's (2001) approach to *phronetic* research where the focus is on the "analyses and interpretations of the status of values and interests in society aimed at social commentary and social action" (p. 60). This chapter has been devoted to answering a series of questions through an analysis and interpretation of the ethnographic materials. In summary:

- *What is it we are looking at when we talk about domestic violence?*
- *Where are we going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia?*
- *When we respond to domestic violence in this way, who gains, who loses and by what mechanisms of power?*
- *Is it desirable to keep going this way in our responses to domestic violence?*

Juxtaposing the study participants' experiences of violence with those of women from the early part of the last century supports a notion that domestic violence has been sustained across time as a mechanism for men attempting to control and dominate women's minds, bodies and behaviour.

When the academic and practice literature on domestic violence speaks to/with and past the narratives of men and women who have lived with violence (as victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses), a diverse and complex array of responses to domestic violence emerges. Across the domains of friendship networks, families, neighbourhoods and formal services, people respond, and in doing so:

- protect survivor/victims of abuse;
- resist abuse directed towards them;
- collude with perpetrators;
- challenge and hold perpetrators accountable;
- become experts at managing acts of violence;
- ignore and dismiss victims' pleas for help; and
- provide shelter, safety and support to survivor/victims of violence.

However, when a key artefact of formal, state-sponsored responding to domestic violence (an archive of brochures) is examined, a different picture emerges. Women are constructed as passive victims who are urged to leave violent relationships regardless of the cost and seek refuge and counselling for themselves and their *damaged* children. Men are constructed as powerful agents who are encouraged to seek help to improve their conflict-resolution skills, manage their anger and moderate their use of instrumental power in the home. Help is constructed in the brochures as something which is effective and readily available from trained, skilled professionals.

In response to the question about where we are going with responding to domestic violence in Western Australia, I have suggested in this chapter that powerful discursive elements shape our responses and are likely to continue to do so. Specifically, our responses to domestic violence are shaped by discourses which are ambiguous to feminism; that is discourses which do not preclude a radically feminist analysis of domestic violence but which do not, in any way, demand one. The retreat from a radically feminist practice base for responding to domestic violence has been facilitated by the black boxing of power and control as the dominant theoretical framework for understanding domestic violence. In addition, a range of knowledge/s have been subjugated which could inspire responses to domestic violence which are more sympathetic to the needs of women and conducive to radical social change in the direction of a feminist peace politics (C. Adams, 1994; Rees, 2003; Warren, 1994). These subjugated knowledge/s include:

- victim/survivors of abuse can be thought of as skilled practitioners of resistance;
- domestic violence may be more than *power and control*;

- informal helping may be as significant and effective as formal helping;
- perpetrators may be open to offers of informal support which does not condone their violence;
- using violence may put men's health and well-being at risk; and finally
- there may be value in exploring the practice implications of promoting and educating for non-violence.

In response to the third question, I have discussed the mechanisms of power which assist some groups and individuals to gain and others to lose when we respond to domestic violence in the ways we do. The valorisation of modernity, the activities of the patriarchal, neo-liberal state, the disciplinary discourses of academia and the hegemonic discourse of coupledness are seen as significant mechanisms which act against the interests of those for whom the embodied experience of domestic violence is a part of their everyday lives. Finally, I suggest that it is not desirable to adopt a *business as usual* approach to responding to domestic violence in light of the limitations of contemporary responses.

Interleaved between this chapter and the next is a portrayal of Sally's experience living next door to a woman whose ex-partner repeatedly breached a restraining order. Over time, Sally's sense of frustration and powerlessness at being ignored by those who had power over her life (for example, the police and her real estate agent), seemed to parallel the experience of her neighbour.

In the following chapter, I address the two final *phronetic* questions: *What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?* and *'What can be done?'* This last question is the culmination of the *phronetic* process (Flyvbjerg, 2001) which I have used here to deliberate on the possible actions we might take to respond to domestic violence.

Sally's narrative

We'd been looking and looking and looking for a place to rent for months and finally we came across this place. The tenants hadn't even moved out or anything, and we just went oh yeah, this is fantastic; it's a really nice unit, let's move in. So we went and had a look through, and were never told anything, just you know, these are such lovely units, very nice, all the rest of it. We thought okay, cool, we like this. It had everything that we wanted. We were just like, great.

I have to say, I was like, I was probably a bit reluctant to go to this area because it is still classified, even now, as a slightly lower socioeconomic area. But it was like a really nice set of units. Yeah, I thought, it's a really nice set of units, I mean it's not a dodgy set of units. You wouldn't think there was going to be any problem. So then I signed up, all the rest of it. So we moved in. The first night I was there, my housemate had gone to work, but my boyfriend was there. Power went out. Anyway, we trundle outside to investigate, and we bump into another neighbour, and we got talking. And I was saying, this is a nice complex, blah blah blah, and he said yes, but we've had a few problems with your neighbours. And I was like okay, like what? And he said, oh, he's a bit, not right. And I am thinking, well, what's not right?

And then later that night my boyfriend and I went outside and there was this guy, he just jumps over like, this little fence, to get into what would be the front yard of our neighbour's unit. Anyway, so we were sort of, I suppose you could say we were staring, and he walked up, hung over the gate and said, what are you staring at? And we were like oh, nothing, nothing at all. Walked back inside and went Christ!

So the next night I was asleep in bed, like dead asleep in bed, and I woke up to what sounded like an animal being... I don't know. Like you hear a cat, but it wasn't like that, it was more like a lion or a tiger making a noise. And I thought what on earth is that? And all of the sudden, like it took me a couple of minutes to come round, all of the sudden I realised what was going on, there was this banging and crashing going on next door. And all I could hear was this little girl, 'cause there is a toddler there, and I think the other one is just walking, and she was screaming at the top of her lungs going, don't hurt my Mummy! And all this sort of stuff, and I was just going, Oh my God, this is insane! What's going on here? And so I raced into Brett's room, 'cause he's at the other end of the hall and can't hear anything, 'cause there is no adjoining wall. Brett, c'mon, c'mon, get up, come and have a listen to this. So we sit on the edge of my bed, and then we heard it again, and she was screaming and he was... And you could only hear, like thumping, not like him thumping her, but more like somebody falling over. It

was really distressing. It sounded like a lion next door, in the middle of a fight. And she was saying, you broke in here. Get out, get out, get out. And she kept yelling at him and stuff and the little girl is going... Like the only thing I caught was like the f word, and he sort of turned around and said you know, shut up and all these sorts of things. Never actually heard like, distinctly heard him actually hit her in that sense, but you knew it was happening.

It just sounded like somebody falling over in the closet or something. Just sounded really weird. And I just said to Brett, this is bizarre! What should we do, shall we call the police? And Brett was going, I don't know and we didn't know what to do, I mean what do you do? And Brett said well, if it keeps going, we'll call the police. But I mean if we call the police in, they will know it's us.

I had never ever ever been exposed to anything even close. Ever. I had never seen it before, never heard what I was hearing and I was just like completely spellbound. I mean what do you do when that happens? So then I sort of, a couple of things started to fall into place. Obviously, the guy was... the day that we met the other neighbour, he was saying a couple of things, and the guy that came banging on the door and jumped over the fence, was obviously this guy that was beating her up. So Brett and I were just absolutely mortified.

So the next day I was furious, oh, I was absolutely livid. And so I rang up the real estate agent. I mean we just signed the lease. We had been in there for three days and I thought, I am not living next door to this. So I ring up our real estate agent, to find that this has been going on for months. Months and months and months. And that was why the other people had moved out. And I felt like saying to them, why the hell did you put us in here? I mean, why the hell would you put anybody in there? The estate agent just said oh, we've been trying to get them out for months.

But I mean he's not even a tenant. She's the one on the lease. They hadn't actually tried to do anything to help, they were just trying to get her evicted. It's sort of like not in my backyard sort of thing, attitude. And I have to say, that's the kind of attitude I had too.

The other thing that I did after I heard it, was ring up the cops the next morning and say, this is the scenario, this is what's happened. Have you ever... ? No no, never heard of anything like that happening before. And I am thinking, really? Later found out that they actually do know quite a bit about these people, that they have been around there numerous times. And I said, what can I do? And they said, well there is not really a lot you can do, except ring us every time he's there. But before I rung the cops I found out from the real estate agent that she had a restraining order against him. So that's why I rang the cops. What's the deal here? If she has got a restraining order against him, what can we do? And he said, not much, she has to enforce the restraining

order. And I was like so I just have to sit there and listen to him beat the crap out of her, 'cause she can't reach a phone to ring and say, he's in my house and he said, well she should ring before he even gets into her house I'm thinking, this is insane, the guy broke in, you know, it's not that simple. And I said, well, what happens if I ring up and say, look this is an anonymous call, but such and such is getting beaten to crappers, could you come round? And he said, well if we come round, she can then enforce the restraining order, from that point. But most of the time they say, no, I don't want to press charges.

So I am just in this daze, after the scenario, finding out all this information. Firstly I am finding out that my real estate agent knew. Secondly that she knows quite a bit about it 'cause she knows that she's got a restraining order against him. So I ring up the cops and find out there is absolutely squat we can do just about, except ring the cops every time it happens. I am like, okay, I have got to live next door to this for at least the next six months, and the best I can do is call the cops in the hope that they come round and diffuse the situation.

After that I did think I need to start sussing this out, with the other neighbours. The night the power went out, I had sort of met everybody in the complex. I think she was home that night, because I had seen the light on earlier, but she didn't come out, oh God no. My understanding is that she tries to lead a very private life around the complex. I wouldn't be surprised if she was quite embarrassed.

But like I was saying, I don't want to call the police. If I call, he might come over to my place and start beating the crap out of me. How am I to know that? Anyway, I woke up the next morning, like after I had done all this police investigating stuff. Woke up the next morning and heard his voice in the house. And I knew straight away, and I thought do I call the cops now? Couldn't hear any yelling and screaming, but I knew it was his voice and he was swearing his head off. And I mean if nothing else, there were two little kids in the house, and oh, I just thought to myself, God. But I mean I had heard her say the same thing to her kids. But at the same time, no- one deserves to be treated like that. So I heard the voice and I thought, uhh, don't know. So I sort of left it, she'll be cool, she'll be right. Left and went to work. And then it just died off, and it did, he didn't come round, we didn't hear anything. The only thing that I heard was her. And the kids.

Like he wasn't coming round for weeks, let's say for an estimate of about four weeks. So then, I'd wake up in the morning to her giving the kids a bath. Like obviously the youngest one would come into her room and wake her up in the morning, which for some reason it was like they were sleeping in my room. Like the wall was so thin. Six o'clock in the morning, 'ding' I am wide awake. Anyway, so she would take them both in to have a bath, and she would just start doing what little kids do, she would play in the bath, they make noise and all that sort of stuff. And then the eldest one would do

something, and the mother would go off her face at the eldest one. And it was done every morning. Every day, the same bang bang bang, the little toys and then fight fight fight and then Mum would go off and the child would go to her room. And I would go off to work going, oh my God, I can't live like this.

The next thing I remember was one night, there was a bang at the door. We didn't have a flyscreen on the door. Kelly opens the door and who should be standing there but him. And she just went, oh shit! And he said have you seen Tracey? And Kelly said he was looking over her shoulder and all this sort of stuff. She has opened up the door, there is nothing between her and him and he is saying have you seen her? Do you know where she is? And Kelly is going, nah, I don't know where she is. And she could tell that he was looking to see if she was inside. Close the door, lock lock lock lock. You know, lock everything up. And as soon as Kelly told me that, I was on the phone to the real estate agent, I want a flyscreen door on there by the end of the week. So we got a flyscreen.

Another night Tracey came banging on our door. I wasn't home but Brett said it was so loud, that they thought she was going to bang the door through. They looked out the window and these cops are standing there going, please don't bang on their door, that's not going to solve the problem, you need to come and talk to us. And what had happened was, he had taken off with the kids, again. And so she's going, no no, you're not going to help me, you're just going to arrest me. These people are going to help me. Anyway they must have finally got her, and had a chat to her and all the rest of it. But she was adamant that they were going to arrest her.

Other things that I had to put up with, with regards to her, was her playing music really loud like to the point where I didn't have to have my radio in my room, because I could sing along to hers. Really loud at six o'clock in the morning. And I would ring up the cops and they would come out and say, we can't hear anything. Which of course they couldn't. And I got to a point where it was so stressful for me to be in that situation, I hated my bedroom, never wanted to go down that end of the house, loved the rest of the house but hated my bedroom. I hated coming home late at night, because I hated walking down the driveway in case he was hiding in the bushes, ready to say to me, have you seen her? If I was confronted by that guy, ever, I was just petrified of him, he's absolutely freaky. And I got so stressed out, I said to my housemates, I'm sorry, I can't live like this anymore, I am going to move out. I really didn't want to go back there. I don't want to live with all those issues. It's just so hard. And that's when I thought I don't have to live like this, I am gonna get myself out of it.

So the other two are there on their own now and I'm staying with my boyfriend. They have called the cops numerous times when he has been around. He has come round quite a few times, but they have called the cops a couple of times, but not every time, because a lot of the time he is gone before they get there. And they just go, what is the point? They are gonna rock up and they haven't heard what we heard the first night,

they have just heard them yelling and screaming at each other and things like that and then he leaves. And they just think to themselves, what's the point? He is gone, she is not going to respond to the cops, cops come around before and banged on her door, and we know she is home but she won't answer the door. What's the point, she is not helping herself, why should we try?

After I'd left, one night they called the cops because they heard him smash what they thought was the window. And the cops came round and actually took them both down to the station and all that sort of stuff. And the next day we found out that he actually wasn't smashing the window, he was throwing bottles up against a wall. Smashing bottles, and not long after that we saw someone come around with a station wagon and pack all the kids' stuff into the station wagon. The kids hadn't been there for weeks and then we saw all the stuff get packed up and then Tracey came round to see Brett and Kelly, knocked on our door and said, can I borrow something, sugar or something? And she said, I am a bit lonely because the kids have been removed to my sister's. Now, whether that happened because she wanted it to, or whether that happened because Family and Children's Services wanted it to, we don't know. I have a feeling it would be Family and Children's Services because they had been around numerous times, or what we think has been them, had been around numerous times. We had heard someone over there before, and she has been saying, don't take my kids away from me.

I think they probably took her away to question her about what happened with him smashing bottles up against her wall. Now, why they didn't sit her down in her home, get her a cup of coffee and question her at home where she would be more comfortable, I have no idea. Why would you take her down to the cop station, I mean it's like this grey building, and it's just cold, and they took her down there as well. But that is obviously where she gets this notion, they are not going to help her.

She is still living there, but the kids aren't there, which has reduced the noise level quite a bit, and he hasn't come round. And the kids have probably been gone for about a month. So it's just a very bizarre situation. Like I said to Kelly, if she goes, if she actually moved out and left, I would consider going back. 'Cause we actually really like the unit. But in all honesty, I don't think I could go back to that room. I have got all these negative connotations with the whole thing now. It's really fascinating though, this whole scenario. I have lost faith in the police, I have lost faith in real estate agencies, and I am really picky about where I live, I mean I was picky before, but now, it's got an adjoining bedroom wall? No way. 'Cause I am not going to live with my neighbour. I want to live next door to my neighbour, not with them.

Chapter 4: Evaluation

According to the evaluation model of narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 1993; Olstedal, 2002), the evaluation component is the most important part. From this component, the point of the story becomes obvious; the listener's implicit 'So what?' is answered (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 86).

In the previous chapter, I described and deconstructed contemporary responses to domestic violence. Using the broad frame of *phronesis*-inspired questions, I illustrated how dominant discourses about responding to domestic violence may have been established and how they prevail. Still using Flyvbjerg's questions, I now develop my evaluation of the story through a process of reconstruction (Fook, 2002). I explore how we (as academics, policy makers and practitioners) might reconceptualise existing power relations, in order to locate/create language/s and spaces for alternative discourses (and radical action) to affect more expansive kinds of responses to domestic violence.

Interpretations of the ethnographic data from this study have suggested a range of possibilities for challenging dominant discourses which currently inform our responses to domestic violence. For example, recognising women who live with violence as expert practitioners of resistance and survival, developing our dialogue skills and re-affirming non-violence as a legitimate goal for society's institutions, are practices which could shift the existing power relations which influence responses to domestic violence.

In Chapter 1, I explained how my purpose in telling the story of this research has been to participate in a process of dialogue with readers (of this document and any others that

may flow from it) about creative possibilities for responding to domestic violence. The thesis document becomes one point in the dialogue, neither a beginning nor an end point. As Flyvbjerg (2001) notes:

Reaching the dialogical mode of communication seems crucial to me for practicing *phronesis* in a democratic society. Polemics typically does not facilitate democracy but is more closely related to the tactics of rhetoric and antagonistic power play. Dialogue, on the other hand - not necessarily detached and without combat, but with respect for other parties and a willingness to listen - is a prerequisite for informed democratic decision-making. (p. 159)

What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?

Interventions by victim/survivors, perpetrators, witnesses and formal sector workers where there is domestic violence tend to be formed around normative notions of: What is the problem? Who is at fault? What can be done? As Sally's narrative demonstrates, people's normative notions are likely to have been influenced by hegemonic power/knowledge claims in relation to *ideas* such as coupledness, the family, gender relations, abuse, privacy, personal and social responsibility and the role of the state. The power/knowledge claims become embedded as the dominant discourses of lay people and professionals, and/or embedded in the various institutions (particularly state-sponsored institutions) which respond to domestic violence. Once embedded, ideas and processes for intervention can become fixed, whether or not they are effective. However, if we adopt such a deterministic view, how does change happen? What is the relationship between structure and agency and how does the individual enact agency in order to resist, subvert and/or influence the powerful matrix in which they live and their wider social environment? In effect, how does it come about (*if it does*) that, as Schmidt (1995) suggests:

We lay down the road in the walking. (p. 1)

How individuals (as active, thinking agents) create, interact with and change the deterministic structures of the social world is a key question for sociologists, social theorists and therefore, for social workers.⁹³ Giddens' (1979) response to the *structure-agency debate* was 'structuration theory'. This positioning between the structuralists (it is all structure) and the humanists/phenomenologists (it is all human agency) suggests that structure and agency are linked inextricably and need to be studied together as a duality rather than a dualism (Layder, 1997; Shilling, 1993).⁹⁴ From this perspective, while human beings are influenced heavily by pre-existing social structures (which privilege certain knowledge/s and discursive formations), these social structures are established and mediated by individual actors. Layder (1997) has supported the view that human subjects can act in ways which transform structures, even though:

I am arguing that such structures possess an obdurate character deriving both from the very powers that they mediate (i.e. the reluctance of dominant groups to relinquish their positions of dominance), and from the temporally induced sedimentation of tradition and authority which underpin these power relations (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Weber 1964). (p. 108)

Structuration theory offers a framework for an affirmation of human agency in ways similar to the theories of affirmative postmodernism (Rosenau, 1992) and postmodern feminism (Flax, 1990). K. Healy (2000) explains the implication of these ideas for social workers, suggesting that:

it is the local relations that enable global phenomena of power. Foucault's work encourages social workers to look at the rich data of everyday practice to understand how social practices are sustained and can be challenged. (p. 45)

This theorising appeals to feminists because it offers an explanation for how patriarchy as structure⁹⁵ determines the subordinate role of women, in particular the way male

⁹³ Agger (1998), discussing the relationship between sociology and social theory, has noted that critical theorists tend to describe themselves as social theorists with a leaning towards 'interdisciplinarity' while sociology, at least in the United States, is dominated by 'disciplinary positivists' who are nervous about the politicisation of their science.

⁹⁴ The distinction being made here between duality and dualism is that the former refers to difference while the latter to separateness.

⁹⁵ Rich (1977) referred to patriarchy as the 'sexual understructure of social and political forms' (p. 56).

power is established and maintained through the global experience of male violence against women (Greer, 1999; Hanmer & Maynard, 1987; Jukes, 1993). At the same time, structuration theory allows for the idea of a powerful human agency; an idea supported by feminist experience in the area of male violence where change has been possible despite the obdurate nature of patriarchy. Women's agential practices have resisted male violence through defining and naming women's experiences (L. Kelly, 1988), establishing women's refuges (Murray, 2002), and lobbying for significant legislative and policy changes (Daniels, 1999b; Weeks & Gilmore, 1996).

Hacking (1999), like Giddens (1979) and Layder (1997), has drawn on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) to explain how social constructionism, as an epistemological approach, allows for the transformative capacity of individual human agency. Hacking (1999) has made the distinction between objects which have a materiality (and can include behaviours) and the idea of an object which is constructed discursively. He has outlined the way in which a person (such as a perpetrator of domestic violence) who is the subject of certain ideas around material phenomena (such as hitting or swearing), has the capacity to *interact* with the relevant idea (domestic violence) and so has a role in forming and/or changing the construction of that idea. For example, women who have lived with violence (as victim/survivors) and women who have worked with them (as refuge workers) have interacted with the idea of domestic violence and so created the idea of victim/survivors and perpetrators. Many of the men who use violence in relationships reject the idea of domestic violence and of themselves as perpetrators, either by denying or minimising the materiality of their behaviour, or by reframing the context in which the behaviour occurred, laying claim to other ideas, such as provocation. For example, Bagshaw et al. (2000) note that a number of men in their study did not subscribe to the idea of perpetrator or domestic violence. These authors conclude from their study that "men did not know how to locate their experiences within the domestic violence discourse as victims or perpetrators (sometimes confusing the two)" (p. 65).

Fawcett and Featherstone (2000), interpreting Foucault, note that the focus for postmodern feminism is not on individual or group emancipation from oppression, but rather “on producing alternative discourses, alternative forms of power and alternative forms of the ‘self’ as a means of changing political relations” (p. 18). Rather than the Enlightenment construction of the heroic and autonomous self, they recognise and validate Flax’s (1992) ‘relational self’, where subjectivities are established and maintained through relationships and the construction of narratives. Similarly, for Maxey (1999):

Foucault (1980), and subsequently a number of feminist geographers ... have suggested that our identities are performative, which means there is no fixed or given self-conscious of which we can ever be fully aware. Our identities are deeply uncertain, as they do not exist prior to our performance of them. (p. 202)

From this perspective, women living with domestic violence may form aspects of their identity through their performances of subjugation and/or resistance to the abuse. One of the problems with dominant contemporary responses to domestic violence is that they tend to be informed by a humanist notion of identity and agency, where the individual is understood to be a coherent entity; free, autonomous and rationally exercising independent moral authority. Thus, women who experience violence (and do not leave the relationship at the appropriate time) tend to be viewed as irrational and/or without agency because their sense of self (often loosely referred to as their self-esteem) is considered inadequate. This construction is particularly damaging for Indigenous women in Australia and elsewhere for whom the humanist construct of the self may be at odds with a subjectivity established and maintained through complex relationships with the land and community (Sauve, 1996; Toubia, 1994).

One of the aims of my research has been to unsettle some of the dominant stories around gender relations for women and men, particularly where there is violence. The purpose has been to create/locate other stories which might be more useful; that is, stories which reflect alternative and less damaging identities and performances than those which populate professional and lay discourses around domestic violence. Having other stories available may assist us in exposing and unsettling dominating mechanisms

of power as part of a larger emancipatory project to critique and subvert oppressive power relations. The possibilities, identified through this chapter, are not presented as solutions to the problem of domestic violence. Rather, they represent some of the fractures, contradictions, schisms and lacunae in the discursive practices of a brittle, Eurocentric, capitalist, patriarchal culture which protects itself against collapse through violence or the threat of violence, including violence against women by their intimate partners (hooks, 2000b; Sheffield, 1987).

What can be done?

Flyvberg's (2001) final *phronetic* question asks: *What can be done?* According to Fook (2002), resistance and deconstruction are powerful tools for social workers whose practice is informed by critical theory. Understanding how dominant discourses are formed and resisting those discourses (in particular our own part in their formation and maintenance) is legitimate and strategic. Following on from a process of deconstruction and resistance to prevailing discourses, Fook suggests a process of reconstruction whereby new discourses and structures are formulated. She notes that:

From a critical point of view, discourses need to be reconstructed in ways which change dominant power relations, and in ways which allow marginal and silenced perspectives to be heard. Changing discourses might also involve renegotiating the ways in which discourses are heard and expressed, and perhaps in renegotiating how these are expressed in relation to each other. (2002, p. 97)

Having attempted to deconstruct and challenge the prevailing discourses around how we respond to domestic violence, I now identify some of the ways in which language, processes and practices can be re/constructed or re/framed to facilitate and support changes to existing power relations (Fook, 2002). The recommendations from Bagshaw et al. (1999) lend some support to this process. They adopted an ecological model for assessing the needs of men, women and young people in domestic violence situations in Australia and they emphasised the role of the primary health and social care systems in

responding to violence. Many of their recommendations made *the community* and those living in domestic violence situations more active participants in the process of dealing with the problem. While the report acknowledged the positive impact of research and services for people who have lived with domestic violence to date, it also noted:

it is timely to review domestic violence theories and interventions in the light of new knowledge and current challenges identified in this research. This research has demonstrated the need for new terminology, more inclusive theories of relationship abuse and a greater diversity of approaches to domestic violence.
(p. 7)

To inform how we might think differently about responding to domestic violence, I have been influenced by Bagshaw et al. (1999, 2000), Ashcraft (2000) and Fook (2002) and their ideas about facilitating alternative practices and creating new terminologies.

Facilitating new cultural practice idea/ls

In the study, participants told me stories about how they had lived with, escaped from, perpetrated, witnessed and intervened where there had been domestic violence. Just as they had interpreted their experiences through a process of narrative (White, 1992b), so I in turn, made sense of their stories through my own process of interpretation, and subsequently through this narrative. In this section, I suggest some cultural practice idea/ls (that is, practices representing implicitly ideal ideas) which may allow new discursive formations to develop in relation to responding to domestic violence. My process of interpretation has been informed by a non-foundationalist, postmodern feminism which has encouraged me to keep a focus on subjectivity, power and gender relations. As I read and re-read the study narratives and the brochures I had collected, I also focused on what was not spoken; ideas and concepts that were [kept] silent and invisible.

The most powerful practice response to domestic violence that I saw in the study narratives was the practice of resistance. All of the participants described resistive practices: to violence; to threats; to all-consuming grief; to the label perpetrator; and to

recruitment into a particular kind of masculinity. For example, Hannah demonstrated her resistance to domination and her ability to claim self-determination:

Hannah: 'Cause ... like he said to me, he said I want you to go and get a job so I thought yeah okay I'll get a job and I could get a job in a factory just up near our house, near our flat.

I said what am I gonna do with Evan and he said this old Italian lady will look after him, but I didn't know her and I worked for a week and when I brought my first week's wages home he said where's your wages woman and I said in my handbag and he said well I want them and I thought if that's your attitude I'm not going to work ... and expecting my son to stay with someone because he wouldn't even talk to me when I come home ... and I thought I'm not having that because he's all I've got.

So I said to him, no I'm not going to work and he said yes you do so I went back to work on the Monday and I come home and I said I got the sack... So I never went to work again because I thought I'm not going to work, having to leave my son with someone I don't know and then come home and I've still got nothing.

Most, if not all of the resistive practices described by participants were a response to a refusal to dialogue. Dialogue was evident in the participants' narratives because it was so invisible, although scattered throughout the narratives were examples of where participants had tried to enunciate their needs or desires. Sometimes, this led to dialogue, most times it didn't and as a result, there were some very sophisticated and effective resistive responses. Like dialogue, the practice (and idea) of non-violence emerged as significant in the study because it was so profoundly absent. However, implicit in any discourse which seeks to respond to [domestic] violence, is a critique of violence and a representation of non-violence as an ideal.^H

Do I get any more naïve? I think this is probably as bad as I get. I talk about non-violence as if it just sits there as the opposite of violence but of course it is more complicated than that. For a start, I'm not a vegetarian so I can't claim the high moral ground around non-violence even though I'd like to. And if we think that non-violence on a global scale is achievable if we just get rid of George Bush and give civil society a go, then as D. Porter (1996) has reminded us (pre-September 11), civil society is also made up of "those seeking vengeance for their humiliation and powerlessness" (p. 33). Non-violence may not be quite as big a deal to some as to others.

The practices of resistance, dialogue and non-violence, which are explored in this section, are not *new*. They are enacted every day within all human societies and they may be even more prevalent (that is enacted more often) than practices which incubate the discourses of oppression which have been critiqued here. However, these practices, for the most part, operate outside of the realm of the dominant actors in a patriarchal culture. Resistance is undertaken by the oppressed to manage their oppressors and so as a practice, it tends to be ignored, trivialised or pathologised by the oppressors.⁹⁶

Dialogue is unnecessary if you expect or are guaranteed your own view of the world and your own way in the world. Dialogue is risky and dangerous if you are the one under threat of violence or retaliation (E. Porter, 2000). Similarly, non-violence is counter to the dominant culture of winning over losing (G. Smith, 1992) so it too is trivialised as weakness and/or appeasement or made dangerous (Bishop, 2002).

Thus, resistance, dialogue and non-violence are practices which remain outside the gaze and interest of the powerful. They are proposed here as beginning idea/s for the creation of alternative discourses for responding to domestic violence. They are linked through the work of emancipatory theorists and activists such as Freire (1972; 1993), Mies and Shiva (1993), hooks (1990; 2000b; 2000c), Bishop (2002) and Roy (2001). Reflecting on the work of Freire, critical theorists McLaren and Tadeu da Silva (1993) have noted the connection between these practices:

That is, resistance must not only consist of the struggle against oppression but through oppression by means of dialogical engagement with and a transformation of oppressive social relations. (p. 82)

⁹⁶ The creation of *pathologise* as a verb has been an act of resistance. It is the less powerful who are pathologised through processes of labelling and marginalisation, usually by professionals. However, it has never been in the interests of the powerful (who usually get to apply the labels) to admit that this is what they do. So as an act of resistance, the less powerful have invented a word which names what is done to them.

Recognising resistance

[Resistance is] any action, imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change, or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes, and/or institutions. These circumstances may involve domination, exploitation, subjection at the material, symbolic or psychological level. (Routledge, 1997, p. 69)

The concept of resistance allows us to recognise and understand some of the practices people use to respond to oppression (Bar On, 1993; Crinall, 1999; Faith, 1994). I explored in detail some strategies of resistance which women who live with violence use to survive. In situations of domestic violence, women and children who are being victimised may resist through self-talk, talking back and other forms of retaliation, real or imagined.^H

According to Routledge's (1997) notion of resistance, it can include actions which try to *thwart change* as well as actions directed towards making change; that is, resistance can be a practice of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. An area of practice under-theorised by and for feminist practitioners, is responding to the resistive practices of men (and the women who support them) who want to retain rather than challenge the social relations of coupledness by denying, minimising or even condoning intimate violence.

It strikes me that we have only just started to get excited about some of these ideas because blokes like Foucault have finally cottoned onto things which have always been a part of women's experience. Resistance is not news to us. I had spent the day reading about resistance and was very impressed with Routledge's understanding and succinct definition. That evening, I'm reading *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (Gaskell, 1908), first published in 1857 and I come across a brilliant passage on resistance. So, Miss Gaskell had managed to figure it out in 1857 and it was no big deal.

For example, organisations in Australia like the Men's Confraternity and the Blackshirts, act out their resistance to the emancipation of women (for example, when women exercise their right to leave a violent relationship) through campaigns against the Family Court, government departments which they view as corrupted by feminism,

and personal and public attacks on individual women. However, men's actions to resist women's emancipation do not warrant regard in the same way as the resistant practices of women who are living in or trying to escape from oppressive domestic relationships. On this, Freire (1972) noted that attempts by the oppressors to regain their control, are qualitatively different from attempts by the oppressed to free themselves:

Resolution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction indeed implies the disappearance of the oppressors as a dominant class. However, the restraints imposed by the former oppressed on their oppressors, so that the latter cannot reassume their former position, do not constitute oppression. An act is oppressive only when it prevents men from being more fully human. Accordingly, these necessary restraints do not in themselves signify that yesterday's oppressed have become today's oppressors. Behaviour which prevents the restoration of the oppressive regime cannot be compared with acts which create and maintain it. One cannot compare it with acts by which a few men deny the majority their right to be human. (p. 33)⁹⁷

Recognising the resistance strategies of victim/survivors of domestic violence acknowledges their agency and competence in coping with the violence. It creates opportunities for workers to support them in their practices of resistance and survival and in doing so to affirm their expertise; that is, affirming that a woman is 'her own best expert on herself' (Rawlings & Carter, 1977).

Dialogic processes

McNay (1994) has suggested how particular discourses are established and how they come to dominate:

If, in any period, it is only possible to speak a few things, it is because the rarefaction of discourse is crucially linked to the reproduction of relations of social domination through the control of meaning. Discourses and meaning are the site of social struggle. The process through which hegemonic social relations are achieved and maintained often involves the stabilization of discursive relations and the fixation of meaning. (p. 75)

⁹⁷ I have refrained from using *sic* to highlight Freire's use of *men* (to represent the universal person), taking a lead from hooks' (1993) and her insightful and respectful discussion on Freire's work and his handling of gender.

One of the strategies of resistance to this kind of hegemonic meaning-making is the use of *enunciative* and *dialogic* space where inter-subjectivity operates to unsettle meanings and create new ones. Enunciative space is where we stake our claim to our own voice. Dialogic space is where we stake a claim to be heard at the same time as we offer our commitment to hear the voice of the other. It is a space where there is a generosity in regard to the other and willingness to shift position (Ross, 2002). Dialogic processes require individual subjectivities to remain fluid with the parties open to the possibility of alternative discourses and processes of meaning-making. This idea of dialogue is premised on the notion of a relativist ontology in the sense that the parties agree there is no fixed, inviolable truth or rightness of the matter. The idea of no fixed truth or rightness does not necessarily equate with a nihilistic relativism or view that 'anything goes'. J.K. Smith and Deemer (2000) note:

relativism need not and must not be seen in terms of 'anything goes.' Rather, relativism is nothing more or less than our condition in the world - it announces that as human beings we are, and can be nothing but, finite. ... Based on this transition, the central issues become those of how do we as individuals make judgments, which we all must, and the extent to which we allow our judgments to move into a public space, which to a certain degree we also must, to engage the judgments of others. (p. 878)

It is the absence of any safe space in which to place judgements (for example, about the rightness of male privilege) that defines many violent domestic relationships. In these relationships, the asymmetrical power relations contained within the institutionalised private space of the couple privilege the male understanding of what can be talked about and what is right. Thus, domestic violence represents a profound absence of enunciative and dialogic space for women within the domestic relationship, so their capacity to negotiate *safely* what it means to be a current or former intimate partner is thwarted.

An absence of dialogic process also defines violent academic encounters where theories and theorists are pitted against each other in an attempt to prove one of them

right. These encounters have been particularly evident in the academic work on domestic violence (Gelles & Loseke, 1993). Similarly, contemporary responses to domestic violence which centralise criminal justice and statutory child protection systems, may deny women opportunities for dialogic encounters with formal helping systems. Potentially, this thwarts their efforts towards self-determination and replicates the structures of the asymmetrical power relations from which they were trying to escape (Tomison, 2000).

Drawing on the work of Rorty, Giddens (in Giddens & Pierson, 1998) has described fundamentalism as a 'deliberate opting out' of dialogue:

Refusal of dialogue – an insistence that only one view of the world is possible and that one is already in possession of it – has a particular, and potentially destructive, significance in a world which precisely depends more and more upon it. (p. 130)

Giddens has acknowledged the importance of combating fundamentalism "because it is always edged with the possibility of violence" (1998, p. 131) and he has suggested dialogical communication as a substitute for violence at the level of macro (global) and micro (personal) systems.^H

Non-violence as anti-oppressive practice

I. Young (1990) defined justice as the "institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation" (p. 39). She identified five 'faces of oppression' which inhibit justice and

This all seems a bit rich now, coming from Anthony Giddens who was recognised through the 1990s as a key adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair (Gauntlett, 2002). It would be interesting to know if or how Giddens has reconciled his theorising with Blair's active support for the invasion of Iraq based on American fundamentalism. Or is it only the other who is a fundamentalist? Maybe I should be kinder to Giddens or at least give him the benefit of the doubt. But then that wouldn't be very harridan-like.

listed these as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. In relation to violence as a practice of oppression, she noted that:

What makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves, though these are often utterly horrible, than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable. What makes violence a phenomenon of social injustice, and not merely an individual moral wrong, is its systemic character, its existence as a social practice. (p. 61)

Understood this way, domestic violence is a social practice of oppression made possible (and acceptable) through patriarchal culture and patriarchal structures such as coupledom, the church, academia and various state-sponsored helping agencies which support and privilege masculinist constructions of the social, cultural, economic, political and spiritual world. For radical feminists, domestic violence (along with other forms of violence against women) is a *necessary* condition for the survival of patriarchy (Greer, 1999; C. MacKinnon, 1987a). Non-violence poses a serious threat to patriarchal fundamentalism.

Rejecting the idea of the enemy as the *demon other* is an aspect of Gandhian non-violence, *active love* (Schmidt, 1995) or what hooks (1994; 2000a) refers to as an *ethic of love*. According to Schmidt (1995):

A principle of nonviolent action is that of non-co-operation with everything humiliating. This includes non-co-operation with dehumanizing images of each other that deny the possibility of transformation. We can recognize how we make enemies by naming someone as enemy. Here, nonviolence means refusing to be a victim while reaching out to the suffering of the abuser. (p. 39)

In the study, Bella's narrative described a response to domestic violence which could be viewed as active love even though she did not name it as such. Bella had discovered her husband unconscious after he had attempted suicide following another violent episode. She realised that she could leave him to die and that if she did, her life would be simpler and easier. However, she made the decision to cut him down, resuscitate him and call for an ambulance.

Bella: *Because I was exhausted. Twenty-four hours. He hassle me everything. And about three o'clock in the morning I got out of bed, I got up. Everything was light. Light everywhere. And I was going to the toilet. I checked, I turned the family room switch and then I looked in the middle of the*

family room and he was hanging ... from the ceiling fan. And there is this plastic rope ... but he got really awful face. His chest expanded and he was purple. He would have died. And I really tried to resuscitate him but I couldn't ring up my ambulance because he, everything, the cord was all, broken. I think I tried to call a taxi that night because I was going to get away from him. But he took my telephone line, everything is broken. Everywhere. ... I went to the next-door neighbour and phoned the ambulance.

Throughout the rest of our interview, Bella talked about the process of separating from her husband and her understanding about why he was violent towards her; she understood the violence in the context of a previous head injury, unemployment and alcohol. At no point during our interview did she speak about revenge or punishment of her husband. However, if as Schmidt (1995, p. 40) has suggested, the “way to peace in families and communities is to govern ourselves lovingly” without seeking revenge or retaliation, what processes, if any, do we use to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence? Forms of justice compatible with an ethic of non-violence or active love, are those based on principles of restorative justice (Consedine, 1995; Wright, 1991).

Problems of violence (as a manifestation of oppression) seem inevitable in cultures which valorise oppression and domination at all levels, such as parent over child, winner over loser, strong over weak, white over black, male over female, heterosexual over other-gendered, human over non-human species, et cetera (Warren, 1994). Thus, violence is likely to continue until cultures of domination and oppression are challenged and changed. As Gilbert (1994) has noted:

If our planet ends up with the nightmare scenarios of increasing environmental destruction, poverty and violence that some commentators suggest, then in part it will be because of our trivialization of the trainable qualities of compassion, empathy and sharing (Eisenberg and Mussen 1989; Gilbert 1989). Thus, as Hinde and Groegel (1991) point out, many may regard aggression and violence as a more important social problem than pro-social behaviour, but this is a mark of the problem itself. ... If males are prone to violence then what has happened to their compassion? But when cultures make competitive values paramount and trivialize the needs and feelings of others, then compassion may be costly. (p. 383)

Creating new identity/subjectivity categories

A number of poststructural feminists have written about the need to make available to women subject positions which are non-oppressive and which recognise their agency (Crinall, 1999; 1994; Fine et al., 2000; K. Healy, 2000). Less has been written about the need to make available alternative subject positions for perpetrators and witnesses who offer and/or provide support to families where there is domestic violence. In this section, I explore the idea of creating new identity/subjectivity categories for victim/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses to domestic violence by drawing firstly on the notion of the *active practitioner* (Stanley & Wise, 1993) and secondly on the notion of *skill acquisition* (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, cited in Benner, 1984; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Stanley and Wise (1993) have made a useful distinction between *practice* and *experience*, noting that there often is a gender division in the way the two are represented. Men generally are considered to be (active) practitioners while women are considered to have had (passive) experiences (p. 56). It may have been a tacit awareness of this active/passive dualism which influenced early feminists to construct and refer to women who experience violence as (active) survivors rather than (passive) victims. Here, I refer intentionally to women as practitioners, to underscore the extent to which they can and do use agential authority (Davies, 1991) to respond to violence.

An aspect of the performed identity is skill acquisition, an idea about how (over time), individuals can develop expertise through a process of staged movement from novice to expert. The Dreyfus model of skill acquisition (Benner, 1984; Flyvbjerg, 2001) identifies five levels of human learning, beginning with the *novice* and progressing through the *proficient performer* to the *expert*:

The proficient performer gradually achieves intimate experience from different situations, all of which touch upon the same goal and the same perspective, but which demand different tactical decisions. The proficient performer then perhaps achieves a level in which it is not only situations, which are recognized intuitively, but also – synchronically and holistically – the relevant decision, strategies, and actions. According to Dreyfus and Dreyfus, this is the level of genuine, human expertise and is characterized by effortless performance. It is the level of virtuosity. (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 17)

A number of women who participated in the study, who had lived with violence, described their responses to the violence in a way which suggested that over time, they had become experts. That is, they had developed ‘virtuosity’ in managing the violence in their homes by predicting their vulnerability to abuse and making appropriate ‘tactical decisions’. These decisions often were undertaken with the goal of protecting themselves or their children from the abuse and/or protecting their idea/l of family life. Barry (cited in L. Kelly et al., 1996) has noted:

Surviving is the other side of being a victim. It involves will, action, initiative. Any woman caught in sexual violence must make moment-by-moment decisions about her survival. (p. 82)

For example, Eileen described how she worked to keep her family safe and together as her husband became more hostile and unstable over a period of several months and then weeks. I interpreted her decision-making and actions as displaying a level of virtuosity in managing a difficult and dangerous situation. When her daughter disclosed that she had been sexually abused by her stepfather, he threatened suicide. At that point, Eileen became acutely aware of her novice status as a soon-to-be single mother, in particular a mother who now had the responsibility to support traumatised children:

Eileen: *Emmy told me what had happened and I just couldn't comprehend it. So that night, I just cried all that night. I was a mess. I just cried. That night I went around to Mum and Dad and said I don't know what to do, I don't know how to cope with this. I was just shell-shocked. I didn't want the kids to know what had happened to Emmy. How do you tell these teenage kids that their Dad has sexually abused their sister?*

In this section, I explore the value of thinking of women as expert practitioners of resistance and of men as novice practitioners of non-violence. In constructing women as experts and men as novices, my intent is to unsettle and displace some elements of the hierarchical binary which consistently positions men as active agents of oppression and women as their passive victims. I construct men as novices to subvert the dominant gender construct which positions them “at the centres of discourse, as the doers and creators of social reality” (Hearn, 1996b). In doing this, I am not suggesting that the truth is that women *are* expert practitioners of resistance or that they *are not* passive

victims any more than I am suggesting men *are* novice practitioners of non-violence and that they *are not* perpetrators. Rather, I am using language to unsettle identities that may not always serve people most affected by domestic violence and to create opportunities for new identities to be formed, performed and responded to.

Women as expert practitioners of resistance and survival

In this study I have looked at the issue of responding to domestic violence through a postmodern/poststructural feminist lens in a way similar to Gardiner (cited in Domestic Violence Prevention Unit, 1999), who has suggested that any analysis of domestic violence should take account of “the relationships between power/knowledge, discourse, discursive practices, resistance and diversity/difference” (p. 3). Using this framework, she has critiqued essentialist and absolutist notions of patriarchy, male power and female oppression and argued for a notion of power as linked to knowledge, as decentralised and resisted. Thus:

While recognising patriarchy, the myriad of ways in which female victims actively employ strategies to ‘manage’ and resist male violence and abuse are also acknowledged. (p. 4)

Here, Gardiner unsettles the more conventional feminist construct of domestic violence by insisting that while women are victims of male violence, they may occupy other subject positions which affirm their agency and capacity for resistance.

In 1979, Walker put forward her ideas of the battered woman syndrome, learned helplessness and the cycle of violence to explain why women stayed with violent partners. Despite research, which challenges the idea that women who live with abusive partners inevitably become helpless (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Bowker, 1993; Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998), the view persists. The victim identity for women who have lived with violence permeates much of the literature, including that designed to assist them, like the archive brochures. Women who live with violence rarely will see themselves depicted as competent, intelligent, strategic decision-makers. Thus, dominant discourses of responding to domestic violence keep silent and invisible actions and intentions by women to prevent or retaliate against the violence being

perpetrated.⁹⁸ Drawing on Foucault, C. Fisher (2000) critiques Walker's battered woman syndrome (which presents women as unwitting passive victims of abuse), noting that:

Rather, women victim-survivors of domestic violence continually resist the perpetrator's exercise of power. This resistance of bodily incursions may be conscious or thoughtful (McNay 1992:79) when they avoid certain people, actions and/or situations (Bowker 1993). Resistance may also be a choreographed demonstration of cooperation: while appearing a 'willing victim' the woman in a violent relationship may watch for openings, for example, planning her escape. Coalescing such fragments of resistance may represent a potential challenge to the status quo. (p. 18)

Few of the women I interviewed saw themselves as passive victims of the abuse and all of them, at some point in our interview, spoke about their strategies for managing the abusive behaviour, resisting and/or occasionally, fighting back.⁹⁹ Bowker (1993) suggested that women not only survive domestic violence but in fact can be thought of as actively responding to and resisting the violence. Fine and Weis (1998) and Goodrum, Umberson and Anderson (2001) report similar findings from their research. C. Fisher (2000) notes that not only do women actively resist violence perpetrated against them in their homes, but they can also become expert practitioners in dealing with and resisting the dominant medical, legal and social work discourses which try to control their lives once they have disclosed the violence and sought help. In the rest of this section, I consider the practice implications of foregrounding an alternative *collective discourse* around women who live with violence, so they are constructed as expert practitioners of resistance and survival.

⁹⁸ Marcus (1992) has made a similar point in relation to the discourse of rape which, she has argued, constructs rape as something that "can only be feared or legally repaired, not fought" (p. 387).

⁹⁹ The study participants who were survivor/victims were giving retrospective accounts from the safety of non-violent spaces in their lives. Were they really as brave as they remembered? Campbell et al. (1998) resolved this issue in their research into women's responses to violence, by using a prospective rather than retrospective design, interviewing women several times, sometimes while they still were living in the violent relationship. They found that even while they were living with violence, women were able to recognise their responses to the abuse as considered and resistive.

As a starting point, if we consider women who live with violence as expert practitioners, they may find it easier to recognise themselves as competent agents who are capable of making the right decisions. In our interview, Geraldine outlined the paradoxical situation which arose for her, when having disclosed the abuse, people would tell her that her partner shouldn't be hitting her. She said she felt at the time that people must think she was really incompetent if they thought that she didn't know already that it was not okay for her husband to be hitting her. From her perspective, she needed people to affirm her ability to manage the violence, by offering support and guidance. She saw that assistance to manage the violence would have given her the space to improve her confidence in her own decision-making.¹⁰⁰

Geraldine: *People'd say he shouldn't be hitting you. I knew that. And if I'd been able to gain a little bit more of self-esteem in myself to work out what his triggers were, to work out what I needed for me to be happy and to feel like an equal partner in the relationship it would be much easier for me to make the decision to leave before he killed me. And, I think a lot of people when they try and help, they focus on what he's doing rather than what she's not doing. And they talk about he shouldn't hit you, he's wrong, he's bad, he's this, he's that. And what's she going to do? She's going to jump straight in and defend him. It's automatic. ... Maybe I deserve it. ... And the woman knows that he's bad and wrong and everything. The last thing she needs is for someone to voice that. That's not positive to her at all.*

Secondly, if women were recognised as expert practitioners, then the choices they make about acting passively, fighting back, staying or leaving would be less likely to be made *wrong*. One of the consequences of the dominant humanist notion of the subject as an autonomous, rational and freely choosing agent is that the static identity created becomes the subject of a hierarchical, dualistic code. The unified subject will have dualistic qualities ascribed to him/her, in a way that the fluid, changeable, discontinuous subject proposed by poststructuralism, will not. The autonomous unified subject can be

¹⁰⁰ This seems paradoxical in that, for Geraldine to feel confident, she needed a support person to assist her to become competent at understanding her husband's abusive behaviour, including assistance to recognise the triggers to his abuse. Once she had been able to do this, she believes she would have had the confidence to develop a strategy to escape. This intervention usually would be discouraged because it could be seen as colluding with the woman that she somehow was responsible for the abusive behaviour.

constructed as weak or strong, passive or aggressive and attached to these elements of the binary will be a hierarchy which is, itself, constituted through the male/female dualism (Davies, 1991). Thus, women who live with domestic violence and who do not leave when they are given the *opportunity* to do so, tend to be viewed as passive and weak and as having made the wrong choice, ill advisedly ‘putting up with’ the abuse, as suggested by one of the brochures in the archive. Conversely, women who use strategies of resistance may also be made wrong by service providers when these acts are viewed as provocative or even as acts of violence in themselves. In the study, Cheryl recounted an event where she took her friend Toni back to her house to collect some of her belongings. In this account, Cheryl identified how Toni’s *talking smart* was made wrong by the police, interpreted as provocation rather than as an act of resistance:

Cheryl: *And I mean, he invited her up there ... to go and pick some of the stuff up. Now there was me and my two sons in the car and we parked in the driveway up the top near the gates and he went for her then. And she turned around and she said: Go on. And that’ll give me something else to have you for. And when I said that to the copper he goes: Oh well, she’s inviting him to hit her. And I’m like ... where do you win?*

Thirdly, human service workers and supporters who can construct women as expert practitioners may be more likely to recognise that women living with violence are often making decisions in a context where their choices are ‘not of our choosing’ (Griffiths, 1995). This is an alternative construction to one where victim/survivors are seen as women who don’t know what choices are available to them or as women prone to making the wrong choices. Lorraine described how she had been influenced by our earlier conversations in her first contact with her neighbour:

Lorraine: *What’s been helpful has been our conversations talking about women’s resistance. As soon as Tamara responded, her response was to say I’m so embarrassed. I’m trying to fix it. That’s when I said I’m not judging you. I think you do a brilliant job of taking care of yourself and it’s not easy. If I hadn’t been aware of what you’re talking about, of acknowledging women’s resistance I think it would have been really easy to skim over her expertise. To miss acknowledging how hard it’s been for her to try and manage, or even the likelihood that she would have been trying to manage it.*

Fourthly, a discourse of women as expert practitioners allows workers and supporters to understand and use the concepts of learned helplessness (Walker, 1979), symbiotic or traumatic bonding (Dutton & Painter cited in Carden, 1994) and the Stockholm Syndrome (Graham et al., 1988), in ways which do not pathologise the woman or her actions.¹⁰¹ A feminist poststructural perspective accounts for these phenomena in a very different way to perspectives which draw on humanist notions of the individual. With the latter, the woman is viewed as having developed a pathological attachment to the oppressor through a process of taking on his values to the point where her values become indistinguishable from his. This can be seen as occurring because the victim loses her sense of 'the observing self' (Mills in Riessman, 1994). However, other explanations (and interventions) may be possible if identity is viewed as a consequence of a fluid subjectivity produced by discourse and social practices. For example, Schmidt (1995) has made the useful distinction between powerlessness and passivity:

Powerlessness occurs when a person is unable to act. It is the loss of self-authority and power within. Powerlessness is not to be confused with passivity. Anne Jones writes of this distinction: 'Powerlessness is a political condition, while passivity is a strategy adopted by the powerless to survive.' The process of rendering a person powerless is the process of victimization. A victimizer holds *power over* another until the victim is devoid of strength and resources. (p. 42)

In a context where there are no competing discourses available to the woman because the environment is controlled by the oppressor (through the use of physical or social isolation), a political situation of powerlessness develops, and passivity becomes an appropriate, active response. Human service workers and supporters who see passivity as a strategic response to violence will be interested in reflecting to victims of violence the idea that they are making the right decision for themselves at this point in time (even if that decision is to stay with the abuser), rather than encouraging them to leave, and undermining their sense of their decision-making skills. This seems paradoxical and

¹⁰¹ In various ways, these terms refer to a phenomenon whereby victims of oppression are seen to identify with (and develop empathy for) their captors or oppressors.

possibly even a dangerous course of action. Geraldine described her own attempts now to assist other women living with violence:

Geraldine: *[When people say] you don't have to live like this, that's not helpful. ... So I found helping other women now, I don't focus on that issue at all. If they are in the relationship – I know women who are in the relationship and I try and take them out of that situation – domestic violence situation – and get them to look at life from outside that house, rather than inside. Like take them out to lunch. Let's have a relaxing time. Let's do something that you want to do for you. And the guilt will just consume them. And I remember that guilt of doing something for me because it just seemed so wrong in a marriage to do some-thing selfish. But until they get that self-esteem, get that balance of okay there is one world on one side of my door and there is a totally different world on the other side. Once they start to get a taste of the new world, that is when they get really hungry for it and it gets easier for them as time goes by to make those decisions they need to – whether they want to stay there and put up with the violence or whether they want to change the way they view the violence or whether they actually want to get out.*¹⁰²

Finally, constructing women who live with violence as expert practitioners may assist workers and supporters to recognise that the decision to leave a relationship is difficult, not only because of recognised risk factors, but also because in making the decision to leave, a woman is deciding to abandon a role where she has established herself as an expert.¹⁰³ That is, the woman is purposefully moving from a position of virtuosity in managing a difficult, dangerous and stressful family life to a position of novice where she has significantly less knowledge and awareness of the dangers and the possibilities. Understanding her decision-making in the context of skills acquisition may give formal and informal helpers a better understanding of why a woman might stay in a violent relationship and, as a consequence, increase their repertoire of responses towards her.

¹⁰² I have had to consider why I am not offended by Geraldine using the term 'put up with' in the same way I was when I saw it in the *Freedom from Fear* brochure. The difference seems to be one of authority. Because Geraldine lived with violence and I trust her motives, I have ascribed to her an authority to use language as she chooses. I have not been so willing to ascribe this same level of authority or trust to the writers of government brochures.

¹⁰³ Browne and Herbert (1997) have noted that "[T]he disintegration of a spouse relationship is a painful and emotional (as well as physical) experience for victims of domestic violence. Many feel dependent, isolated and confused, unable to deal with the notion of separation and divorce. Those who do, find it difficult to face the legal problems that follow; the custody of the children, maintenance, the division of property and most, most importantly, the protection of themselves and their children" (p. 71).

Making sense of the staying

Most of the women interviewed for the study who had lived with violence initially had resisted messages about the imperative of leaving the relationship. For most of them, attachment to their partner or to the idea of coupledom, home and place had been stronger than attachment to the idea of leaving.¹⁰⁴

The time when women are most maligned and least recognised as expert practitioners is when they decide not to leave their abusive partners; to ignore or reject what Mahoney (cited in Bacchi, 1999) has referred to as a 'discourse of exit'. According to Worth and Tiggemann (1996), why women stay in a violent relationship or return after a period of refuge has been, until recently 'one of the most perplexing questions' (p. 377). C. Fisher (2000) observed how some medical personnel in hospital accident and emergency departments label women as 'regular presenters' and blame them for their victimisation. Women are blamed for failing to leave a violent relationship and attended to (like chronic alcoholics), after more worthy cases have been seen to. Thus, the dominant construction of a healthy response to domestic violence is one where women take advantage of help offered and leave home in order to ensure their safety and/or that of their children. Eisikovits, Buchbiner and Mor (1998) have challenged the tendency "to view the leaving of violent partners as an exclusive sign of battered women's development of strengths and coping ability" (p. 48). As Peled et al. (2000) have noted more recently:

The tactics that proved useful in promoting the problem of woman battering also have created new myths and injustices. One such myth is the stigmatization of battered women who stay in relationships with their abusers as a deviant group: 'battered women who stay' (Loseke & Cahill, 1984). (p. 18).

¹⁰⁴ In our interview, Barbara remarked on the difference between her first violent marriage and her second. She left her first husband the third time he hit her, having told her parents what had happened and giving him *one last chance*.

There is ample evidence that some women stay in violent relationships (as Barbara and Eileen did) because of threats made against themselves or their children if they attempt to leave. Given that women are most at risk of serious injury or death around the time of leaving or attempting to leave a violent relationship (Campbell, Webster, Koziol-McLain, Block, & et al., 2003; Mouzos, 1999), they are right to take threats seriously.¹⁰⁵ As Barbara explained her reasons for staying:

Barbara: *You can see him. You can't be looking over your shoulder. It's a silly thing because people think you have no control but you do have control because the devil is there right with you. He's not around you waiting to strike. You know when he is going to strike because you are in that house with him so you know.*

According to C. Fisher (2000), women who stay can be regarded as enacting resistance because of the myriad of ways in which they may suffer if they leave (p. 19). Chung (2001/2002) notes that when women and children leave the family home, this "can plunge them into a sequence of poverty, chaos and transition for years" (p. 11). Ian, one of the study participants who intervened as a bystander when he witnessed a woman being assaulted, represented her concerns about leaving the relationship:

Ian: *He'd been violent in the past It was his house [they were living in] but all her furniture and all her stuff was in there and it was her car. And she was wondering what was going to happen to her stuff and her car because he'd taken possession of that.*

It is a reflection of patriarchal arrogance, particularly in academia, that so often it is assumed that women who stay are attached to their partners rather than to other aspects of the lives they painstakingly have established. Thus, rather than exhibiting a pathological inability to leave a violent relationship, some women may be demonstrating a healthy insistence on staying in a place/space which is a source of pride and strength in their lives (Edwards, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, death threats become more effective at stopping women from leaving violent relationships, the more this fact is publicised and generally made known.

Reconstructing *staying on* as part of a positive identity/subject position for victims of violence and as part of the language of coping, resilience, survival and/or resistance may be one way of inventing new discourses around what healthy responding and intervention can look like for women living with violence. Simply advising women to leave relationships where there is violence or assuming that they should, potentially negates her sense of self and what she believes is important, such as her role as wife, mother, homemaker and community member. A formal service provider or informal supporter confronted by a woman who continues to live with her violent partner, will respond to the *not leaving* differently if it is viewed as a decision based on survival and/or resistance rather than as a sign of a weak, ill informed or misguided personality.

Facilitating the leaving

All of the survivor/victims interviewed for this study eventually separated from their violent partners, with the exception of Hannah whose husband was killed in an accident while she was in hospital having her second child. At the time of the interviews, Michael and Simon saw themselves as non-violent. Where participants had witnessed and/or intervened in violent relationships (as neighbours or bystanders), with the exception of Denise, the resolution in the stories seemed to be a final separation.¹⁰⁶ Tragically, in Janet's case, this came about through the murder-suicide of her grandchildren and son-in-law.

Women who resisted leaving violent relationships, tended to stay until they had experienced a sense of 'ontological insecurity' which Eisikovits et al. (1998) describe this way:

¹⁰⁶ Denise and Kevin's neighbours moved away soon after they had visited them to complain about the verbal abuse. Within weeks, Denise and Kevin became aware of the physical and verbal abuse occurring in the house on the other side of them. Rather than attempt any intervention with these neighbours, they sold their house and moved.

At this point, the women define the situation as a threat to their inner selves and experience what Laing (1965) termed ontological insecurity. When they do so, the dread is so unbearably painful that they recognize that it is impossible to continue everyday life as it was and that a major reorganization is imperative to regain some measure of security and meaning. (§ 45)

Riessman (1993) recognised that there often were ‘triggers’ to women re-evaluating and subsequently leaving violent relationships and Patton (2003), with reference to ‘turning points’ notes that:

When the turning point was an incident of severe violence, the woman’s decision to leave was often triggered by the realisation she could be killed if she stayed and the risk of that happening was greater than the previous barrier to leaving – believing she would be killed if she left. It is difficult to imagine the courage needed to make such a choice. (p. xv)

In this study, I have used the term ‘epiphany’ (Denzin, 1989) for the events most of the women described as those which brought them to their decision to leave, either immediately, or once plans could be made and acted upon.

Epiphanic events create spaces for women to engage with new ideas about who they are and what is possible. Workers and/or informal supporters may be able to recognise these significant events and support women to improve their safety by interrupting unhelpful identity constructions. In the study, for example, Bella mentioned several times the psychiatrist who attended her husband after his suicide attempt, an event which she saw as epiphanic. The psychiatrist advised Bella that her husband was an alcoholic and unlikely to stop drinking and change his behaviour. This information from a person in authority seemed to have a strong influence on Bella’s decision to use his hospitalisation as an opportunity to end the relationship:

Bella: *But my friend, she talked to the psychiatrist who was dealing with him. She said, she’s a lady psychiatrist, a doctor, and she said he could stop for how many years? Four years not drinking. But because he is a chronic alcoholic, he will drink again. That is what the doctor said.*

Events like these potentially *open the door* to new discursive arrangements and make it possible for the woman to see and hear ideas outside those she has needed to focus on in order to survive. Alternatively, the events may help her to resolve the conundrums which exist for her when the dominant discourses which pattern her life are in conflict.

For example, women are urged to be rational rather than emotional in their decision-making and yet rationality, when you have children and no obvious means of support, would dictate that you stay in the relationship and use the knowledge, skills and experience, that is the *expertise* you have acquired, to survive. As Geraldine noted:

Geraldine: *As far as I could see my whole future was with him and it was really hard to look outside that boundary. I had no education so I couldn't just go and get a job and get myself a flat or anything. I had no money because all my money was tied up in the business. He'd cut me off the bank account so I couldn't just grab some money and run and he owned my car.*

Workers and/or informal supporters who recognise the woman's rationality and skills, rather than simply her powerlessness or victim status, are in a position to create a space where new discursively produced subjectivities can be assembled, performed and/or reinforced.

Supporting the staying away

If we think of victim/survivors as novice practitioners once they have left the relationship (where they were expert practitioners) we may be better placed to recognise and appreciate what they have left behind. This may enable supporters to expect and recognise grief for things such as home, family, status, means of support, intimacy and a planned future. For Eileen, her husband's departure from the family implied the loss of family *per se*:

Eileen: *Mum realised ... like ... she said to me one day ... you've got a hell of a lot of grieving to do because you've lost ... it's like a death in the family. And Mum sort of saw that, like the whole thing was like a death in the family. Not so much that Steve was gone. That wasn't the death in the family. The death in the family was the fact that all our family values had gone. Like all my notions of a family. Like that was just all out the door and that was a real hard process to deal with.*

Supporters may be able to help women in that liminal space between separation and re-incorporation (Epston & White, 1992) if they can recognise that the leaving possibly has been an ill-defined and frightening beginning to a journey away from violence rather

than an ending to it. The process of learning new skills and new inscriptions in order to develop virtuosity as a single parent and an identity which can withstand the scrutiny of discursive arrangements which assume and/or privilege coupledness, is unlikely to be easy or straightforward. Towards the end of this chapter, I explore why a journey metaphor of migration might be useful for thinking about the complexities involved for women who leave violent relationships.

Men as novice practitioners of non-violence

Schmidt (1995) has defined non-violence as “the mutual strengthening of relationship free from forms of physical, psychological, sexual or economic oppression” and she links it to “a feminist vision of a just world for all” (p. 2). Similarly, hooks (2000b) refers to a posture of non-violence which opposes all forms of domination and oppression as explicitly feminist. It may not be enough to deal with the issue of violence against women just by trying to understand violence. We may need to develop a better understanding of non-violence in order to develop strategies to prevent and resist violence (personal communication, M. Carmody, February 22, 2002). The *Expanding Our Horizons* conference at which Carmody raised this issue, drew together feminist activists and researchers from many countries and yet few if any of the presentations (including my own) addressed strategies for non-violence. When Carmody raised the issue of non-violence, she received a mixed reaction from the audience. Some responded nervously to her suggestion, and expressed their concern that a feminist focus on non-violence would come at the expense of attention to women’s suffering and oppression. This exchange illustrated one of feminism’s fundamental tensions; the tension between a *separate-sphere* and an *historicist* positioning. It is the latter which encourages a process of enlisting men and women together to subvert violence and oppression where it occurs (Agger, 1998).

Feminism has a long history of association with non-violence and the issue of violence against women. As Schmidt (1995) notes:

The philosophies and practices of feminism and non-violence show how issues of violence and recovery are related. Feminism opened an analysis of the oppression of women and children that revolutionized the movement toward social justice and made it more possible to imagine a non-violent world.

The combined history of feminism and non-violence has created alternatives to violence that build on the mutuality and equity of our human experiences. (p. 1)

Here, I have taken the view that a worthy goal of emancipatory practice is to develop and enhance an ethic of love, which simultaneously can challenge the oppressive practices of patriarchy, white supremacy and exploitative capitalism (hooks, 1990; 2000b). Enacted through cultural, social, economic, spiritual and political practices, the goal of our interventions where there is domestic violence would be to assist men who use violence to become proficient practitioners of non-violence. Thus, a useful first step in the construction of alternative discourses may be to construct perpetrators of domestic violence as *novice practitioners of non-violence*.

I have explored the practice implications of creating and using an alternative identity for women who are victims of violence. Now, I explore the practice implications of an identity construct of perpetrators as novice practitioners of non-violence. However, I have found this section difficult to write. I have found myself wanting not only to explain the problem of hegemonic masculinity (Buchbinder, 1997; Connell, 1995), to consider why men (significantly more so than women) are prone to use violence (Egger, 1995), but also to propose solutions. Eventually, I decided to resist doing these things, and instead, offer some of the ideas embedded in the study narratives and reflect on the limitations for women responding to perpetrators of domestic violence. I found that once I had considered the idea that perpetrators of violence are novice practitioners of non-violence, the problem *of* men became a problem *for* men in much the same way as the study of whiteness (K. Clark, 2001; McIntosh, 1988) suggests that the problem of race is a problem for whites and “not because it’s a bloody black issue” (S. Young, 1999).

On the issue of gender relations, women can find themselves in a conundrum. If, as Gilligan (1982) suggested, women’s moral maturity is expressed through an ethic of care and connection rather than simply through an ethic of rules and contracts (as men’s tends to be), then the emotionally charged work of unpacking masculinity and working the changes that need to happen so men experience and learn non-violence, could easily fall to women to perform. As Gilligan (1987) noted:

women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Woman's place in man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. (p. 67)

Women may be drawn into the work of helping men to become more skilled non-violence practitioners. The challenge for women is to resist the desire to nurture and support men too actively in their personal and social change work. If women can't or won't resist, then we risk replicating the dynamic which forms part of the problematic; that is by re-creating the gender-defined and hierarchical binary of nurturer/nurtured.

This dilemma was illustrated by Lorraine when she explored her involvement in supporting her neighbour Tamara:

Lorraine: *If I think about the role of men in this and then I think about the role of women in this, it is the women who are taking care of the business. So if we think about Tamara, her daughter is the contact person if I need to ring anyone, she is staying with her sister or a female relative ... She's contacted me to keep an eye on the place and keep in contact with her daughter informally, which I'm really happy to do, and there is no sign of any men being engaged in this network. Now there may be and I don't know about it.*

Subsequently, in discussing her relationship with Nathan, her neighbour on the other side, whose wife had left him following abuse, Lorraine explored how women offer support and care to men, even when they don't particularly want to do this work:

Lorraine: *There were a couple of days when I wondered how safe Nathan was physically and mentally [after Sarah left]. And I didn't feel it was safe to go near him because I had no idea what he knew [about Sarah] or what space he was in, plus I was so pissed off with him I didn't think I could trust myself.*

The subsequent conversations, he sought me out; he caught my attention to let me know he and Sarah were talking. And in his mind, I think, working things out. And so the conversations more recently have been Nathan telling me he has realised he's been abusive. And he's been crying and realising what his abuse has done to Sarah and to his previous partners. So he's - and it was in one of these conversations that he made the comment to me that I did the 12 weeks of the group before and I didn't think ... he said either violent or abusive. I can't remember. Making the comment that he didn't hit her - I don't remember if he said - often or every day. So he didn't see himself as having to be in that group.

And then again, he's telling me he's crying and upset and getting counselling. So I acknowledged that it is difficult, he's in a good space to make change. But basically I just wanted to shout at him. And tell him to grow up and get a

vasectomy. But I said things like you're in the right space, it must be hard. Affirm, affirm, affirm.

For poststructural social theorists, the subject is a constituted subject. Manias draws on Foucault to explain:

Foucault (1980) refuted the concept of the active subject because he considered it as an effect of power-knowledge. Accordingly, he considered that historically located, disciplinary processes enable and constrain individuals to behave in a particular manner. (1998, p. 57)

What are these 'historically located, disciplinary processes' by which men acquire the necessary power-knowledge/s to become male? Like all successful dominating disciplinary processes, they remain largely invisible. Patriarchy, as a likely disciplinary process in the construction of hegemonic masculinity, invisibly has developed and maintained a dominant discursive position across the globe in much the same way as white supremacy and exploitative capitalism (Agger, 1998; Hearn, 1996b). Agger (1998) has noted how prior to feminist theorising, "gender politics were invisible to male social theorists, who regarded issues of sexual politics as non-issues" (p. 99).^H

How did/do they do that? How does the process of creating a hegemonic masculinity work itself silently? Apart from a handful of feminists, doesn't anyone notice? Of course they notice. The trick is to have at the ready a whole lot of excuses to divert attention away from the central issue of how it happens. Keep them wondering why it happens and keep them away from the how, lest they put a stop to it. Of course, what seems to happen is that it takes a while for women (and some men) to discover the how. By the time they have, many of them have died and the new lot coming through have been led to believe that things are changing and it will only be a matter of time before everything is okay. By the time they realise that nothing has changed, it is too late and the whole process has to start again, pretty much, back at the beginning.

MacKinnon (1987b) has explained how this has worked:

The perspective from the male standpoint is not always each man's opinion, although most men adhere to it, nonconsciously and without considering it a point of view, as much because it makes sense of their experience (the male experience) as because it is in their interest. It is rational for them. A few men reject it; they pay. Because it is the dominant point of view and defines

rationality, women are pushed to see reality in its terms, although this denies their vantage point as women in that it contradicts (at least some of) their lived experience. (p. 150)

Pro-feminist masculinity theorists (Buchbinder, 1997; Connell, 1987, 1995; Hearn, 1998; Pease, 1997, 1999, 2000) speak of the ways in which a hegemonic masculinity defines for men what it is to be male. Connell has defined hegemonic masculinity as:

the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (1995, p. 77)

Buchbinder (1997) has noted that it is men who ‘confer masculinity’ onto other men, although he has noted that “gender ideologies circulate socially via both genders, not just one, which means that certain pressures may be exerted on men by the women in their lives” (p. 369) to act out a particular kind of masculinity. Thus, women, particularly those who have internalised patriarchal ideology, can play a powerful role in the construction and maintenance of a hegemonic masculinity and so *as a gender*, we are not outside the problem of male violence.

Notwithstanding the role women (often unwittingly) play in reinforcing patriarchal ideology through their private and public relationships, it seems as though the task of redefining masculinity so that to be male is to become an expert at non-violence, will need to be predominantly the task of men working as individuals and in groups. Horsefall (1991) has made a similar point, not because she necessarily considers it a task that falls to men because they naturally ‘confer masculinity’ onto other men, but rather because she considers it to be their collective moral responsibility. However, men who accept the responsibility as men to do the work of defining masculinity as non-violent may have to deal with the resistance of men who want that task in order to preserve a particular, traditional kind of masculinity which feminists have critiqued. As Mansfield (2000) notes, the idea that men are best suited to socialise other men is well supported by members of the fundamentalist men’s movement. This view, represented for example by Bly (1992) and Biddulph (1995), holds that boys need stronger male models if they are to develop into proper men, which by their definition, will be men situated on one side of the gender binary as *not women*.

Ian participated in the study because he had witnessed an assault on a woman by her partner, at a shopping centre. In our interview, we explored the role bystanders had played in helping the woman and we also discussed the role of men generally in building relationships to support or work with men who use violence. Ian recently had trained as a social worker and reflected on how this might influence his response towards violent men. He had trouble imagining himself establishing any kind of relationship with the perpetrator of the violence he had witnessed, outside a professional counselling relationship, although he found it easier to imagine his family offering support or refuge to the woman. He also reflected on a relationship he had had prior to training as a social worker with a male friend who had been violent towards his wife and noted that where there was an existing relationship, he had been prepared to put in the time and energy to help the person to make changes.

However, he acknowledged that regardless of any pre-existing relationship, attempting to redefine masculinity away from dominant constructions which can include tolerance for violence was a difficult thing to do:

Ian: *That's really hard. ... I think because at one level it's easier to support women because you can, you can take a very clear position and it's a socially acceptable one as well. You collude with them. You support them. You know. But with men, to, to – hang on, how can I say this without – in one way, to say to a guy you know your comments are offensive, your violence is not on or whatever, is going against the dominant culture around that. So you're putting yourself out on a limb straight away. It's not socially acceptable ... It is and it isn't. You know.*

One of the critical factors in the process by which men can “assist each other to make these radical changes within and outside themselves” (Horsefall, 1991) is the type and quality of relationships that men can form with one another, and the potential for these relationships to support a process of redefining what it is to be male (Hearn, 1996b). For example, among the study participants, non-judgemental relationships with men were important for Michael and Simon when they responded to the crises caused by their violence.

Finally, it is worth noting that some forms of therapeutic intervention with men who use violence are based on a construct which recognises explicitly that men are novice practitioners of non-violence. Jenkins (1990) draws on narrative therapy to help men locate barriers to non-violence. In 2004, the Dulwich Centre began its Privilege Project which uses a web-based dialogic process to attempt social change through an explicit acknowledgement of the role of power and privilege in sustaining various forms of dominance (Dulwich Centre, 2004). The main focus of the project is ethnic dominance but the ideas are applicable to gender relations and the project offers a framework for men to consider the sources and implications of male privilege with a view to creating non-oppressive relationships with women and other men.

Lay witnesses as potential practitioners

I use *witnesses* here to refer to people who witness domestic violence in the sense that they become aware of it through direct observation or disclosure. People become witnesses to violence through informal and formal roles. Eleven of the 16 study participants witnessed domestic violence and responded or intervened in some way. Five of the 11 witnessed violence as neighbours and responded either by contacting the police, directly offering support to the victim and/or letting the offender know that he was *disturbing the peace*. Two others, Rick and Cheryl, offered support and emergency accommodation to a close friend. Geraldine offered support to her ex-husband's new wife, telling her that *one day you'll phone me and I'll come and get you* and Trish and Janet provided intensive, long-term support to their daughters. As a bystander, Ian witnessed and intervened where there was a domestic assault in a public place, offering what Gardner (1997) has referred to as 'public aid'.

The purpose of this section is to suggest and explore a collective identity for lay people who witness domestic violence, which represents them as *witness practitioners* rather than invisible spectators who are peripheral to the stories and/or passive victims by virtue of their witnessing. The role of witnesses to domestic violence, particularly family and friends, may be significant in determining what happens next where there is

violence. Witnesses can influence the outcome positively and/or negatively for perpetrators and survivor/victims of abuse (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; G. Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Espejel, & Pick, 1999; Goff, 2001; K. Healy, 2000; Hearn, 1996b; L. Kelly, 1996; Wilcox, 2000; Worth & Tiggemann, 1996).

One of the silences revealed from the analysis of domestic violence brochures was in relation to the potential helping role for lay witnesses. Discourses which privilege disciplinary expertise and professionalism dominate discussions on domestic violence intervention. Informal helping outside formally sanctioned service provision (for example, as volunteer advocates) is largely invisible and un(der)valued (Goff, 2001). Constructing informal helpers as witness practitioners with varying levels of skills and expertise opens up a range of possibilities about how members of the wider community might be trained, mentored and supported to improve their skills to respond to domestic violence, so they can move from novices to experts in this role. For example, in the study, Lorraine became practised and experienced in liaising with the police so they could become more effective in their intervention with Tamara. Sally on the other hand, remained overwhelmed and incapacitated by her experiences as a witness to violence, becoming a secondary victim of the abuse perpetrated against her neighbour.

In addition, a construction of witnesses to domestic violence as potential practitioners paves the way for some discussion in the general community and among professionals, about how professionals in relevant disciplines (such as social work, medicine, psychology and law) might use their knowledge and skills outside of the formal context of their professional practice, as witness practitioners in their own communities. In this study, a number of the participants who intervened as neighbour or bystander had a heightened sensitivity to domestic violence and what to do about it, because of their human service training and experience. For example, in our interview, Stewart made specific reference to his training as a health professional and to his wife's values and skills as a teacher which he believed influenced their joint decision to intervene by phoning the police at their neighbour's request.

However, the idea that there may be a legitimate role for lay witnesses to intervene where there is domestic violence raises a number of issues about who is responsible for providing essential human services: citizens (as members of civil society) and/or agents of the state (as formal state-sponsored service providers). Firstly, it raises the issue of how professional service providers, who usually work for the state or in state-funded agencies, might recognise and work with informal practitioners. In a preliminary report as part of her inquiry into the role of informal support where there is domestic violence, Goff noted that there was “only a 45% level of support for the proposition that a formal service would always engage with informal networks in their intervention process (assuming that they had the permission to do so)” (Cultureshift, 2000a, p. 15). In a conversation I had with Goff after the release of the final project report (Goff, 2001), she commented on the hostility she had experienced from some service providers in relation to her research. They had been uncooperative with the study aims, viewing them as devaluing and undermining of the work of professional practitioners in the area of violence against women (personal communication, S. Goff, July 8, 2003).

In the stories I collected for this study, contacting the police was the most common response undertaken by witness practitioners. However, there was no evidence that the police were willing to engage actively with lay people who were supporting victim/survivors or perpetrators of abuse. Most participants found that the police dealt with the issue in a routine kind of way which excluded them from any expanded or future role. For example, Rick and Cheryl, who had provided refuge to a friend and her children, were told by the police to stop providing the emergency accommodation if they couldn’t deal with the ex-partner’s aggression:

Rick: *And they told us to stay out of it and if we wanted him to stop hassling us, then, kick her out.*

Ian described the *matter of fact* way the police responded to the woman and bystanders involved in the public assault he had witnessed. Although not particularly surprised or critical of the police response, he thought that the police could have offered some support or follow-up to the bystanders who had spent more than an hour supporting the woman in a highly tense and potentially dangerous situation. Lorraine had ongoing

contact with the police about her neighbour and she became adept at managing the police response by phoning back if they did not attend within a reasonable time and ensuring that she recorded job numbers. Although Sally and Lorraine would have been able to provide evidence to the police about repeated breaches of restraining orders, neither was asked to give evidence. Similarly, neither was offered support or advice about how to urgently report that a breach was taking place, even though each of them had attempted this on numerous occasions. Bella's story was the only one which indicated a willingness on the part of a formal service provider to engage with informal helpers. Bella's friend phoned her husband's psychiatrist on her behalf and it was through this contact that Bella was encouraged and supported to separate from her husband. Thus, according to the study narratives, there seems to be a tendency for formal service providers largely to ignore or discourage lay practitioners from responding where there is domestic violence even though there is considerable evidence that they do anyway and often with success.

A second issue which emerges when witnesses are constructed as potential practitioners involves the risks associated with the state abrogating its responsibilities for social care, by handing these responsibilities over to a willing, potentially competent yet totally under-resourced community sector (Bryson & Mowbray, 1981; Yeatman, 1998). Goff (2001) was aware of this dilemma when she undertook her research on the role of informal social support where there is domestic violence. She notes:

The crux of the issue is not whether or not effective formal (sic) support happens or even how much it happens but whether the government and community will use this deeply embedded social capital to offset its investment in addressing other family and domestic violence issues. This concern has put the Study in a difficult position - needing to accurately describe how personal support takes place while also being aware of the political context of so doing. (p. 100)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ There was an unfortunate typographical error in the report where the appearance of the word formal (rather than informal) reverses the intended meaning of the sentence.

Using the language of capacity building, social capital and mutual obligation many Western governments now are attempting to shift responsibility for social problems back to the community (Everingham, 1999). The appropriation and manipulation of a discourse of social responsibility and mutuality by the state has resulted in policies such as Work for the Dole and a renewed focus on volunteering. This *third way* of government rejects totalising, centralised solutions to social problems and seeks to *give back* power to local communities to define and intervene in local issues (for example, Newbrough, 1995; Sturgess, 2001). However, the problem with the community as the principal site for the enactment of social responsibility is that it is perilously close to the domestic. We need to be cautious about how far we go in colluding with the interests of government and capital to reduce the role of the state in the provision of services to those in need. Firstly, formal services are vital in the mobilisation and enactment of effective informal service provision (d'Abbs, 1991; Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983). Secondly, when the state retreats from its role as a service provider to make room for the community, we know that by and large it will be women who (unpaid or poorly paid), will pick up the responsibility to care for others, build capacity and improve communities (Everingham, 1999; Stehlik, 1993).

Locating practice spaces

So far in this chapter, I have discussed what we might do to challenge and change some discourses which are performed through mediocre, ineffective and even harmful responses to domestic violence. Firstly, I have suggested that developing and supporting resistant, dialogic and non-violent practices to respond to domestic violence may be useful. Secondly, I have proposed creating new ways of thinking about women who experience violence, men who use violence and people who witness it.

As a third strategy for thinking about *what can be done*, I draw from the study narratives to try to identify those spaces (real and metaphorical) which may be created, recognised or affirmed as sites from which we can practise or facilitate acts of resistance, dialogue and non-violence as part of our responding to domestic violence. I

draw on the work of critical and postmodern geographers such as Routledge (1997), Keith and Pile (1992) and Massey (1992; 1994) to focus on the political nature of space (Roseneau, 1992).¹⁰⁸ Specifically, I consider hooks' (1990) use of the spatial metaphor of 'homeplace' (as it has been interpreted by Soja & Hooper, 1992) and also Bhabha's (1994) notions of 'liminality' and 'interstices' to suggest some ways of thinking about spaces where useful work to respond to domestic violence may happen. According to Pile (1997), the potentialities of resistance and change can be understood in the context of space:

Scales (such as the body, locality, region, nation and so forth), boundaries, inner worlds, positions of opposition, movement, physical space all speak of the production of space, but not simply as an echo of domination - for, there are other possibilities for resistance in the dislocations through, for example, frictions of distance, the blurring of boundaries, and hiding and coming out. It can be argued that different power relations may produce different spatialisations and, further, that resistance may well operate between the spaces authorised by authority, rather than simply scratching itself into the deadly spaces of oppression and exploitation. (p. 13)

Soja and Hooper (1992) draw heavily on the work of hooks (1990) to demonstrate how the concept of space can be used both materially and metaphorically to further a counter-hegemonic (that is, resistant) political project (p. 185). Homeplaces, as spaces for radical work, allow for the reconstruction of discourses and the re-visioning of what is possible. Routledge (1997), in his exploration of how political resistance works, makes this observation about homeplaces:

In order to effect this resistance, actants must establish (however temporarily) social spaces and socio-spatial networks that are insulated from control and surveillance. Such spaces may be real, imaginary, or symbolic. Bell hooks (1991) refers to these spaces as 'homeplaces' which act as sources of self-dignity and agency, sites of solidarity in which and from which, resistance can be organized and conceptualized. (p. 71)

¹⁰⁸ De Certeau (1984) suggests that 'space is a practised place' in the sense that *space* connotes movement in terms of time, direction and speed. *Place* on the other hand, implies a fixity which not only is immobile but also 'proper' (p. 117).

In what I see as a contrast (but not a contradiction), Bhabha (1994) valorises the interstitial spaces between specific domains as *ambiguous spaces* where new cultural meanings can be performed and produced:

It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed ‘in-between’, or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? (p. 2)

In the rest of this chapter, I explore how homeplaces and/or liminal spaces (conceptualised as inherently political) can be created (made) or located (found) in order to give us the energy, time and courage to respond creatively where there is domestic violence. My focus primarily has been on those spaces located outside and/or in between the domains of the various formal state-sponsored service providers, as these are the spaces informal practitioners (survivor/victims, perpetrators and witnesses) are most likely to be able to ‘create, claim, defend and use’ without excessive ‘control and surveillance’ by the state (Routledge, 1997, p. 71).

It may be useful to consider homeplaces and liminal spaces as spaces where survivor/victims and perpetrators can act *through their bodies* to respond to the violence and where witness practitioners (formal and informal but with a focus on the latter) can act non-coercively *towards the body* of the victim/survivor or perpetrator.¹⁰⁹ For example, women’s refuges can be thought of as homeplaces for women to rest their bodies, reconstitute themselves and re-vision their lives. However, for formal and informal practitioners, refuges act as ambiguous liminal spaces (in between the private and the public, neither one nor the other), for action towards the embodied survivor/victim. I am not suggesting that effective responding to domestic violence happens *only* in spaces which can be thought of as homeplaces or liminal spaces. For

¹⁰⁹ As Brown (1992) has noted, the state has authority to act coercively *upon* the body *without* consent as part of its prerogative role.

example, there is nothing *in between* about a courtroom and yet a restraining order or a sentence for assault can be a tangible and useful response to violence (Campbell et al., 2003). Liminal spaces are generally unguarded and unsurveilled by the state or agents of a hegemonic masculinity (although not always) and so the idea of liminality may help us locate and create some of the spaces we need for innovative and creative interventions.

Epiphany as homeplace

Most of the women in the study who had lived with violence, identified an event or series of events as epiphanic (or turning point experiences), after which their view of their abusive relationship and/or their view of themselves was never the same again (Denzin, 1989). Epiphanies may reflect hooks' (1990) notion of homeplace in the sense that they provide a space from where the person-subject can engage in a dialogue with the self as part of the process of identity constitution (Davies, 1991; White, 1992b).

In his introduction, Bhabha (1994) defines epiphany as the "birth of the 'subject' " (p. 1). An epiphany unsettles the constituted subject, creating a sense of ontological shock and representing the person with conflicting and competing discursive positions which need to be considered, re/assembled and managed in some way. Eisikovits et al. (1998) use the notion of boundaries in a spatial metaphor to describe how epiphanies affected the women they interviewed who had been living with violence:

Strong violence, an unexpected audience for it, or a change in its locus or escalation brought some women to the realization that the boundaries they constructed around the violence were trespassed. Once they realized that the boundaries were figments of their imagination, they perceived the violence as more dangerous and thus more unacceptable. (¶ 34)

A number of authors (such as Eisikovits et al., 1998; Goff, 2001; Patton, 2003; Riessman, 1994) have noted the significance of epiphanies as triggers for survivor/victims of abuse to reconstruct meaning about their lives. In our interview for this study, Geraldine described an epiphanic moment for her when she realised that she and her unborn child might die if she did not leave her husband. After this experience,

she never saw the relationship in the same way again, even though it took some time for her to effect an escape:

Geraldine: *It became a very clear point for me. ... He wanted me to leave the house because I wouldn't live as a second wife to this other woman. And he got so wild he actually beat me unconscious And it was when he had me around the throat and was hitting me, that I ... [clicks her fingers]. It was like a light came on and it was like you're going to die for love here which is fine for you girlie but what about this baby? And that for me was the turning point. Like it was fine for me, I was quite happy to die for love because I thought that was a virtue, and then I realised no, you can't take this child with you. And that became for me the point of [thinking] what am I going to do instead? There's got to be something else.*

Epiphanies are experiences of the mind *and* body, involving the rational processing of experiences to/within the body, because, as Shilling (1993) notes, the mind and the body are “inextricably linked as a result of the mind’s location within the body” (p. 13). In Geraldine’s case, the epiphany created a homeplace from where she could process the embodied experience of the assault. Barbara, who had endured violent assaults and threats for many years, identified the days following first her mother’s and then her father’s death as life-changing events for her. One of the reasons Barbara had never disclosed abuse to any member of her family was because of the shame and stigma she attached (and felt others would attach) to another *failed marriage*. Once neither parent was alive, she and her husband separated. For Bella, the physical act of cutting down her husband after he had attempted to hang himself, knowing that he had risked the likelihood that his daughter would find his body, brought her to a realisation that their relationship would never be the same again. After Trish had read a draft of this document, she told me that she can recall the moment (when it was, where she was sitting) when she realised that the violence (*any* violence) was not okay. From that moment, she began planning to leave the marriage. For Helen, the trigger to end the relationship was her own thoughts of murder/suicide and for Eileen, the knowledge that her husband had sexually abused her daughter.

As C. Fisher (2000) notes, domestic violence is generally identified by medical, legal and social work practitioners as episodic violence, even though individual acts of abuse

usually are part of systematic oppression within a relationship. A disclosure or discovery of the violence (for example, when the police attend) may trigger a formal agency response (such as a referral to a refuge) which presumes that the woman wants to leave the relationship (if she hasn't already). However, a woman needs to consider a complex array of factors as part of any decision to leave or stay in a relationship. These usually are far more complex than many professional and most lay helpers will understand, particularly if their relationship with the woman is poorly developed. If epiphanies are homeplaces from which victim/survivors redefine and re-vision their situation and identity, then lay and professional helpers may need to have a better understanding of the role of epiphany in the lives of survivor/victims. They may be able to facilitate a woman's self-determination if they can recognise turning points in her thinking and decisions about whether or not 'what it was won't be anymore' (Eisikovits et al., 1998).

While the notion of epiphany has been explored in relation to victim/survivors of abuse little seems to be known about the role of epiphanies in the lives of men who use violence against their intimate partners. Simon seemed to experience an epiphanic moment when he threw a drill at Joanne, breaking her toes. At that point, he recognised he needed help and seemed to remain open to receiving help from then on. Although they did not use the language of epiphany, McMaster and Swain (1989) used the concept of 'fatal peril' in reference to men who use severe forms of violence against their partners. According to McMaster and Swain, some men experience the defying of their authority as a life-threatening event or even as a form of death. At the point where their expectations around their authority are thwarted, these men believe literally they are going to die:

The concept of *fatal peril* ... has as its basis the notion that violence is a response to a life-threatening event. Since male socialisation tends to tie men's sense of self-esteem so tightly to the notion of power over women, men also tend to cast refusal by women to respect male authority as such a life-threatening event. It is believed that men experience a moment of fatal peril when women defy men's authority or refuse a service that is expected. The moment of fatal peril is a dramatic, momentary fear of dying, of not being able or willing to survive. That moment is often the point that coincides with physical violence. (1989, p. 65)

This experience may be epiphanic in the sense that it may act as a trigger to murder/suicide, occurring at a time when some men realise that their lives will never be the same again as a consequence of their partner finally leaving them and/or obtaining residency orders for children. In our interview, Janet described what had happened the day before her son-in-law killed her grandchildren and himself:

Janet: *Then on the Wednesday afternoon, her [Kym's] neighbour phoned ... and she said I don't know what's going on but Frank's in the house, the house is in total darkness, all the blinds are drawn and she said there's silence. She said I'm very worried. Two police went out there – a male cop and a female. ... He walked in, he got in the house. Frank was curled on the floor, huddled, crying on the floor. The house was an absolute mess. The children, they were okay. The children were okay. Now, to me this is not a man who is capable of looking after children. Now this cop sat with Frank for two hours. He gave him the cards for Men's Helpline, all these different places that he could ring.*

Mouzos (1999) has cited a study which identified the link between men's sense of vulnerability when their wives leave them, and their risk of perpetrating murder/suicide:

Barnard et al. (1982) conducted interviews with men who had killed their wives and found that either threats of separation, or actual separation, are most cited as the precipitating event to the homicide incident and are taken to represent 'intolerable desertion, rejection, and abandonment by the males'. (p. 11)

Thus, men such as Janet's son-in-law and Patrick Dalton may be vulnerable to an epiphanic experience of fatal peril as a consequence of a particular event or realisation. Intensive supervision and support by family and friends (who themselves are being supported and advised by formal service providers) may be a useful intervention which recognises the role of epiphany in the lives of men who use violence.

When practitioners (formal and informal) are unaware of the possible role of epiphanies as turning points in people's lives, they may offer or impose help which is poorly timed or inappropriate. As a consequence, offers of help may be rejected or if taken up, ineffective. Whether we identify as victim/survivor, perpetrator, informal and/or formal helper, as practitioners, we may want to consider the question 'Why now?' as we go about our activities to intervene where there is domestic violence. Answers to the question may provide some guides to practice.

The *home space* as *homeplace*

The home is the most significant location where domestic violence is perpetrated and resisted, even though some of the acts and activities of violence (and acts of resistance), occur outside this space. Feminist activists have used the term *domestic* violence to emphasise the privatised nature of this kind of violence; to demonstrate the subordination of women as part of the public/private and work/home hierarchical binaries which have been an integral part of normative, patriarchal discourse. Privacy, a significant aspect of the Western patriarchal couple/family, puts women and children at risk of assault in their homes (Brown, 1992; Franzway, Court, & Connell, 1989; C. MacKinnon, 1987b). Thus, opportunities to create spaces for resistant, dialogic and/or non-violent practice within the home, where there is domestic violence, are limited, usually by the presence of the perpetrator. According to Franzway et al.:

The citizenship rights of women and children are mediated by the family, and in this sense the state recognises the privacy of sexual relations. But it is a privacy dominated by men as husbands and fathers. So the state exercises its power to protect its citizens from the sexual violence of men ambiguously and, at times, reluctantly. (1989, p. 106)

However, while the state and its various institutions act to protect men's privacy in the context of their intimate relationships, women are also co-opted into the task of protecting the privacy of the couple/family through the dominant construction of what counts as a *good woman*. According to C. Fisher (2000), a good woman is one "who can 'keep the peace' and should be able to control her husband. If he is out of control, she has failed" (p. 155). Barbara illustrated through her narrative how she had internalised the responsibility for her husband's violence. She explained in our interview how she was reluctant to disclose the violence because she didn't want people thinking she had no control over her family:

Barbara: *Like, one night when the kids and I had taken off ... he'd gone out and kicked over the letterbox. And the neighbours – he said something the next day like what was going on last night? Tom came out and kicked over the letterbox. And I said oh I don't know, I wasn't home. Because you didn't want people to know. It was ... it really is an embarrassing thing; that you can't*

cope. That you're not... That you've got this bloody dickhead. It's like when one of your kids, when something goes wrong with one of your kids you're telling people, my God, I can't control my own family member. It's embarrassing.

If the home is to become a politicised space for resistant, dialogic and non-violent responding to domestic violence, then practitioners will need to develop strategies to challenge the code of privacy which prevails in nuclear families and the concomitant construction than many women have that they are responsible for their husband's behaviour. The experiences of the study group participants suggested that this could be facilitated in two ways. Firstly, homes were able to become homeplaces for women if authority figures removed and/or kept the perpetrator away. For example, for both Eileen and Bella, intervention by mental health authorities meant that they had some space in their lives to separate emotionally and practically from their partners. Secondly, I am suggesting here that family homes may become homeplaces for women living with violence as a consequence of family, friends and neighbours occupying the home space in real or symbolic ways.

This process was articulated by Geraldine towards the end of our interview when she talked about what *might* have been helpful to her at the time she was living with her partner:

Geraldine: *[To be helpful] I think if people had said, I know you value your marriage and I know you think you are doing the right thing but this is not getting you out of this. Look back. You've had six years of this. Nothing's changed. He's not about to stop. Let's find some answers that will help you to cope if you decide to stay, or will help him change because you're changing who you are. If I'd had someone say that to me, that would have made a big difference because it gives me some kind of a choice and some kind of a control over the rest of my life. Rather than, stay here and be a victim or get him into trouble with the police and you might be able to escape. Saying you need to leave isn't helpful, otherwise I would have left. Leaving was not an option. For me, if someone had come and said let's help you to cope with what you're going through, without even having to put a word on it, or call it domestic violence, that would have helped me a lot. To learn personal skills, ways of looking at what he did, what got him to that point and how not to get him to that point.*

Here, Geraldine has suggested that it would have been helpful to her to have someone stand outside the taken-for-granted knowledge/s about domestic violence (such as she shouldn't feel responsible and she can't change his behaviour et cetera) and stand alongside her as she tried to understand the dynamics of the violence:

Geraldine: *For me, I would have found it a lot easier to leave if that [leaving] hadn't been the only option. It would have been better for me to concentrate on self-esteem issues and pull myself up and then I could have said hang on enough is enough. You either change buddy or I'm out of here, or you're out of here. I think to get women out of that situation, they need to approach it like they are not trying to get them out of that situation.*

In this context, a practitioner would need to take it as given that they were engaging with an active, intentionally acting person rather than a passive, unreflective victim. As Ferguson (2003) notes:

At the heart of this new paradigm for theorising welfare is an attempt to move beyond the traditional construction of a passive 'client' to focus on the capacities that human agents have for 'reflexivity'. This refers generally to the ability to act in the world and to critically reflect on our actions and in ways that may reconstitute how we act and feel and even reshape the very nature of self identity itself. (p. 199)

The anarchic nature of informal responding (Dimitriadis, 2001) and the uncertainty, complexity and danger involved where there is domestic violence, means that formal service providers need to be cautious about how they engage with informal helpers. Formal support for informal responding where there is extreme violence may not be appropriate:

While all family violence is to be condemned, not all family violence is the same. In particular sociopathic violence – that is, the person who is using the violence is without remorse, and they find pleasure in the suffering of others – is a form of violent behaviour that cannot and indeed *must not* be dealt with by informal supporters. (Cultureshift, 2000a, p. 40)

This is a sound recommendation in the context of Goff's (2001) proposed community based project which recommends linking survivor/victims of domestic violence with informal supporters or advocates. However, outside of a formal project developed and monitored by formal service providers, some people still may find themselves intensively supporting women living with sociopathic violence; that is, women who

have yet to establish the means to escape and/or may be resisting contact with helping agencies. As a consequence, formal service providers still may find themselves supporting informal practitioners who are witness to extreme violence in the home.

Community as liminal space

As noted earlier, here I draw on Bhabha's (1994) notion of liminal space to describe spaces where innovative and creative responses to domestic violence (particularly by members of informal networks) can take place. These spaces are outside and/or in between the taken-for-granted and more easily recognised sites for responding to domestic violence, most notably formal agency settings and the family home. I use the word *community* as a starting point to reflect on this location for practice.

The word community is used in many contexts and has a number of different and contradictory meanings. Bender (cited in Bulmer, 1987) explored the notion of community by starting with the accepted view of community as *locality*, then taking this further and including the elements of experience and relationship:

This social memory has a geographic referent, the town, but it is clear from the many layers of emotional meaning attached to the word community that the word means more than place or local activity. There is an expectation of a special quality of human relationship in a community, and it is this experiential dimension that is crucial to its definition. Community, then, can be defined better as an experience than as a place. (p. 26)

From this perspective, community is a construct of people in relationship with one another where there is some level of connection and interdependence. Kenny (1994) has suggested that community "reflects a reality constructed by people themselves" and further, that communities develop organically through freedom of association. Similarly, Muirhead (1994) has viewed community as something that is defined from the *inside* such that a person's community "is that group of people who they think of as their community" (p. 5). Kenny has noted that although communities usually develop through shared understandings, values or experiences, this does not mean that they operate without differences or conflicts and she has warned against using the term in a

way which allows differences and contestations around power to be concealed or masked (1994, p. 36).

L. Kelly (1996) and G. Allan (1991) observed a marked decline in the use of the term community from the early 1980s due to its overuse and contested meaning in the sociological literature. However, L. Kelly (1996) has suggested that the term should not be abandoned but rather reconceptualised to take account of its diverse forms. Thus, community can be thought of as:

place (localities, neighborhoods, history, diaspora); *interest* (churches, leisure, professions, political parties, organizations); *identity and experience* (race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, age); and *circumstance* (workplaces, residential institutions, schools, colleges). (p. 71)

Pardeck, Murphy and Min Choi (cited in Lane, 1997) have taken the notion of diversity further and define community as a domain where 'reality' is 'linguistically developed' and as a consequence, it is fragile and contingent but still 'sufficient to unite people' (p. 334). From this perspective, community can describe a set of relationships where values and meaning are explicit, contested and negotiated or where they are implicit and taken for granted. Values and meaning may be in consensus or in conflict without necessarily undermining the notion of community. For Labonte (1993), like Peck (1987), community describes an experience which is momentary, fleeting or imminent. From this perspective, community is never fully established or settled once and for all; it can be represented as 'always a birth in progress' (Palmer, 1998).

Goff (2001) notes that most recently the language of community and community development has been replaced with the language of *capacity building* (Hawe, King, Noort, Jordens, & Lloyd, 1999), *civil society* (Cox, 1995; Naidoo, 2001; Robinson, 1995) and *social capital* (Putnam, 1993, 2000). The idea of capacity building is to maximise the effect of groups (formal and informal) coming together to build infrastructure, partnerships and problem-solving capability (Hawe et al., 1999, p. 18). The discourse of capacity building is a discourse of pluralism and consensus and so it has little to offer postmodern feminist goals in relation to a problem like domestic

violence. However, the term civil society is more useful and there is a general agreement that it describes the myriad of structures and institutions in a society located spatially between the individual/family and the state (Farrar & Inglis, 1996; Robinson, 1995). Social capital, viewed as the 'raw materials of civil society' (Alston, 2000) and conceptualised as 'social glue' (Cox, 1995), is another term which resonates with some of the progressive understandings of the notion of community. Social capital is regarded as the various voluntary relationships and norms in a community which create (and are created by) interpersonal (and inter-organisational) trust, connectedness and the processes of civic life (Edwards & Foley, 1998).

However, just as earlier critical social work theorists tended to be wary of community as a 'spray-on solution' for social problems (Bryson & Mowbray, 1981), so there are concerns now about the renewed interests by government in notions of civil society, social capital, mutuality and communities. As Alston (2000) notes, governments' increasing interest in social capital and civil society seems to parallel its declining interest in the welfare state. There also is little evidence that governments have been able to operationalise effectively the idea of community through public policy in order to ensure that it becomes something more than just a 'reform fad' (D. Adams & Hess, 2001).

Notwithstanding contestations around the notion of community, I recognise it here as a significant site for resistance and change where there is domestic violence (Holder, 1998) precisely because the state struggles to manage it. In this section, I explore some of the possibilities which present themselves when we think of community *spatially* as a site for practice. As a starting point, Holder (1998) has argued that community development is a much under-used response to domestic violence and that listening to survivors will provide valuable insight into how practitioners can respond to domestic violence. She has suggested that if we look at domestic violence through the prism of community development we encounter three important resonances:

- First, that of a respectful and deeply radical way of regarding communities.
- Second, confidence in the creativity and clear-headedness of community possibilities – indeed of women's own survival strategies, and

- Third, the very real dilemmas and dangers involved. (p. 3)

Challenging and interrupting the privacy of the home space can act to support the interests of women who live with violence. However the masculinist state has little conviction for this task and even if it did, the consequences of state surveillance and involvement in the family can be highly problematic, particularly for those already under the gaze (Donzelot, 1979). Brown (1992), for example, has noted how the state controls women's lives through working its power/s in contradictory ways, particularly in the way it trades off protection from violence for the regulation of private lives. She has noted that:

Domination, dependence, discipline, and protection, the terms marking the itinerary of women's subordination in vastly different cultures and epochs, are also characteristic effects of state power and therefore cast state-centered feminist politics under extreme suspicion for the possibility of reiterating rather than reworking subordinate conditions and constructions of women. (p. 12)

Here then, community (as civil society or vice versa) is recognised as a liminal space between the individual and the state, and viewed as a site where resistance and change are possible precisely because the term community is so ill-defined and the space is difficult for any group or the state to manage.

Community as neighbourhood

One of my first interviews in the study was with Stewart, who told me his story about responding successfully to his neighbour's request to call the police.¹¹⁰ Towards the end of our interview, we discussed other possibilities for community responses to domestic violence, and Stewart suggested the involvement of Neighbourhood Watch.

¹¹⁰ Women who approach specialist domestic violence agencies are often assisted to develop safety plans. One of the suggestions is that women tell family members, a friend or neighbour about the abuse and request that they contact the police if they hear loud or suspicious noises (Cultureshift, 2000b).

His suggestion reflected his interest in the role of informal supporters responding to violence, either out of concern for their own neighbourhood amenity (such as *peace and quiet*) and/or for the wellbeing of the victim/survivors of abuse.¹¹¹

Like some of the other participants in the study who witnessed violence as neighbours, for Stewart, living in a community means you have a right to a certain peaceful amenity and that domestic violence, even though ostensibly it is *behind closed doors*, disturbs that amenity and neighbours have a right to object and protest. Most of the study participants, who had responded to violence in their neighbourhood, spoke about involving other neighbours or bystanders in the response, even if they never managed any collective action. Their awareness that the violence was not okay (for a number of reasons), their willingness to respond at the time and their willingness to participate in the study, suggest that visionary ideas for responding to domestic violence from within the community (Schmidt, 1995; L. Kelly, 1996; Holder, 1998; Goff, 2001) may not be too fanciful. However, the observations from this study overall, support Goff's (2001) findings (from her study on personal supporters and domestic violence) that there is a need for members of the public and formal service providers to be better educated about family violence, in particular about how to respond effectively. In line with Stewart's suggestion, a number of resource and training packages being developed aim to educate and assist informal helpers to respond effectively where there is domestic violence (for example, Cultureshift, 2000a). Scanning Neighbourhood Watch websites (such as Neighbourhood Watch Victoria Inc., 2005) indicates that although it is a widely recognised crime prevention strategy, particularly in Australia and the United Kingdom, there have been no attempts to include education and training in relation to domestic violence into the strategy. Community policing programs focus on the protection of properties rather than those who reside in them (Maguire, 1988). However, in the summary paper of postings from an on-line conference on informal responding to domestic violence (*Close to Home*, 2003), it was noted that attempts have been made in

¹¹¹ Neighbourhood Watch operates in a number of countries as a crime prevention strategy. The police co-ordinate and support neighbours to look out for their neighbours' properties, by reporting suspicious people or activities to the police (Piper Pictures, 1988).

the United Kingdom to ‘cocoon’ women who have been threatened with violence by enlisting the help of supportive neighbours, backed up by formal police protection through restraining orders.

Within the liminal space of community (represented so far as neighbourhood), certain spaces seem more significant as locations for the enactment of resistance, dialogue and non-violent action than others. For example, embedded within the study narratives, were recurring references to neighbourhood spaces on the margins and in between private homes or shops. This is hardly surprising, because the inside of the home often was precluded as a site for intervention because of the actual or anticipated presence of the perpetrator. However, it seems worth considering how and why these interstitial spaces might operate as sites for responding to violence if we want to develop guides to informal, community-based practice. Locations such as front yards, backyards, footpaths, letterboxes and verges were used in different ways by the study participants to respond to the violence. For example, Denise considered approaching her neighbour on the footpath outside her home or leaving her a brochure in the letterbox, although she didn’t act on this. Lorraine used these same spaces to establish and maintain contact with her neighbour Tamara and to engage in conversations with Nathan, her neighbour on the other side. Some of the study participants used front yards or backyards to claim back the amenity of their neighbourhood by letting people know the violence was *not on*. Unfortunately, as relatively unsupervised and ambiguous spaces, these spaces can also be occupied by those who want to resist counter-hegemonic discourses and practices. As noted earlier, the Blackshirts have used footpaths, letterboxes and verges to harass and intimidate women who have left them (Abbott, n.d.; de Krester, 2002).

Women’s refuges as homeplaces: Liminal and vulnerable

Women’s refuges are one of the most significant and enduring artefacts of the women’s liberation movement, overtly challenging the right of men to claim their partners and their children as possessions. Refuges act as homeplaces for women individually and collectively because they are recognised as *women-only* spaces. They also are liminal spaces for the enactment of resistance; neither private homes nor public institutions and

therefore, for the most part, removed from the gaze of men. Refuges are located in communities and yet they are not necessarily a part of the community with their confidential locations, high fences and intense security:

Refuges provide a 'space' physically and figuratively for women to escape the panopticon of a violent relationship. The challenge for refuge workers is to actively work to facilitate the disembodiment of subordinating ideologies and expose the women to alternate discourses surrounding the causes and nature of domestic violence with the view to their returning to the 'community' to live independent, violence free lives. (C. Fisher, 2000, p. 105)

Women's refuges have been developed purposefully by feminist activists to be spaces where women (as staff and residents) can take ownership of the discursive practices which define the experience of living with and escaping from violent men.

However, they are vulnerable spaces. For example, the Australian Federal Government, through its funding program for supported accommodation, has begun to define women who leave violent relationships as homeless (Summers, 2003), thereby disguising the 'gendered geographies of fear' (Warrington, 2003) which have made them so. In Australia, there is also a concomitant shift in the policy discourse towards supporting women to remain in their own homes following separation from a violent partner (Edwards, 2004). While this is reported in the context of *promoting choices*, feminist activists will need to stay vigilant to ensure that refuge access for women (for respite, to *teach him a lesson* or as a pathway to permanent separation) is not made any more difficult than it is already.

Men's groups as homeplaces

Both of the men in the study who had been violent towards their partners, spoke positively of supportive men's groups. Simon participated voluntarily in a formal domestic violence intervention program and Michael's homeplace was a group of male friends. Like women's refuges, men's groups (in their various structured and unstructured forms) may have the potential to become homeplaces for men to develop subjectivities which are intolerant of violence and/or to become skilled practitioners of non-violence (see, for example, Laming, 2000). Programs also are being developed

(some residential) which provide respite for men who consider themselves at risk of becoming violent. However, feminist practitioners have been nervous about men's groups which operate outside of the formal, supervised sphere because they see the possibilities for them to adopt the pro-masculinist ideology of some men's rights groups such as the Men's Confraternity and the Blackshirts. These groups become places from which men act to defend dominant and privileged constructions of masculinity.

The constructs of homeplaces and liminal spaces have been used in this section to frame some of the ideas which emerged from the study narratives in relation to possible sites for resistant, dialogic and non-violent practice. The discussion has been bounded by the experiences of the study participants and so the ideas are tentative and underdeveloped, presented as points of departure for ongoing research and discussion, rather than definitive statements about what is, can or should be possible to enhance informal responding where there is domestic violence.

Finding a new metaphor: Migration from the Couple Nation

I have explained my purpose to invent and share new language about how we might respond where there is domestic violence. As a final strategy for thinking about our responses to domestic violence, I have considered the role of metaphor, in particular the victim to survivor journey metaphor which now forms part of the dominant discourse in relation to women who live with violence (Chung, 2001/2002; L. Kelly et al., 1996). Metaphors are devices which assist in the evocation of meaning. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Metaphors generally make something which is complex easier to understand by presenting it in terms of something which is less complex (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They also can be used to expand and complicate meaning, or (whether intentionally or not) to limit and restrict meaning. For example, journey metaphors are particularly troublesome if you want to unsettle the idea of progress and certainty, because they tend to evoke automatically the idea of a linear and progressive movement to a fixed destination.

However, metaphors can be problematic because their evocation of phenomena or events can masquerade as the only *true* representation of that phenomenon or event. For example, L. Kelly et al. (1996) have suggested, in relation to women who have lived with violence, that the “popular therapeutic notion of a ‘journey’ to survival, with accompanying notions of ‘healing’ are both naïve and inappropriate” (p. 94). Thus, any metaphor can privilege a particular standpoint, order or interpretation and is therefore as circumscribed by relativism as much as any other discursive process. As Fesmire (2004) notes, “metaphors are more than rhetorical flourishes; different metaphors open up different possibilities and connections” (p. 256).

When study participants spoke about their experiences of living with violence, they spoke about events which had happened in the past, from the perspective of someone who now was in a *new place*. For the women who had been victims of violence, there was a strong sense from their stories that they had made a journey from victim to survivor and it is not surprising that this metaphor tends to dominate the domestic violence discourse. However, participants’ narratives were sufficiently varied and complex for me to agree with L. Kelly et al. (1996), that the victim to survivor journey metaphor has limitations. Firstly, the metaphor evokes an understanding of domestic violence which reinforces the notion that the journey away from violence is relatively linear and straightforward. Secondly, by focusing on the experience of the victims of abuse, it makes the experiences of the other actors, in particular perpetrators and witnesses, invisible. Thirdly, the metaphor works with a modernist notion of subjectivity whereby the person is assumed to have a relatively stable and fixed identity; that is, having become a survivor, she is no longer a victim. A concept of identity as constituted, fluid, negotiated and unstable is excluded. Finally, the metaphor reinforces a historicist construction of the social world, suggesting that women simply move through time from being a victim to becoming a survivor, creating an “implicit subordination of space to time that obscures geographical interpretations of the changeability of the social world” (Soja, 1989, p. 15).

I wanted to develop an alternative metaphor to evoke women's journeying because I was interested in representing the experience of journeying away from violence *spatially*, in order to expose spaces for witness practitioners to occupy and to allow for movement in, around and between the violence. Thus, I propose a metaphor which privileges the experience of women but evokes an understanding of domestic violence which incorporates into the problematic, actors other than the women and their children.

The spatial metaphor of the Couple Nation is designed to evoke some of the diverse aspects of nationhood – nationalist chauvinism, nationalism, loyalty, sovereignty, citizenship, border *security*, human rights, solidarity and identity – in the context of privatised, heterosexual coupledness.¹¹² One aspect of contemporary feminist discourse is the interest in women's citizenship and women's claims to protection by the state from human rights abuses such as domestic violence, rape and honour killings (Kozma & Dauer, 2001; Hamilton, 1999; Peters & Wolper, 1995; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994):¹¹³

We also frame domestic violence as an issue of citizenship grounded in the right to bodily integrity which links private violence with public restitution from the state. (Daniels, 1999a, p. 3)

Within the context of the nation – couple or otherwise – and regardless of the state's willingness to intervene to protect them, those victimised by human rights abuses can respond in a number of different ways, including resistance (passive or active), escape, return and/or participation in processes of reconciliation.

¹¹² Sharp (1996) has explored the links between notions of national identity and gender, in particular the symbolism of the female as a '*symbol* of nationalism and honour' which is protected by masculine agency (p. 100). Munt (1998) has explored the meanings attached to nations and nationalism in the context of the Lesbian Nation.

¹¹³ Feminist scholars argue that citizenship is an inherently gendered concept, because citizenship is defined within the public realm of civil society and not in the private sphere of the home where for most women, their identity is located or performed. Thus, women's citizenship rights are difficult to claim (Brown, 1992; Hamilton, 1999). Even when the claim to citizenship is successful, women still face a state which is patriarchal and only willing to enforce citizenship rights such as protection from abuse, under specific conditions which themselves reflect a gender bias (Bacchi, 1999). Despite the argument that women are unwise to rely too heavily on the patriarchal state to protect them from abuse (Brown, 1992), there still is a strong view that "there is no practical alternative to making demands on the state" (Franzway et al., 1989, p. 128).

Victim/survivors and witnesses to human rights abuses within the Couple Nation act to resist the violence in many complex ways – fighting back, being passive, being strategic, involving authorities and offering or accepting protection.¹¹⁴ Other victims escape and in doing so take on a ‘migratory subjectivity’ (Braidotti, 1992), leaving home as forced emigrants, asylum seekers or nomads. Having escaped, some return back home, hopeful that peace has been restored in the Couple Nation. No-one leaves their history, identity and possessions easily. If they have been mistaken, and peace has not been restored, they may engage in further resistance activities, only to flee again. Sometimes victims and those who are precious to them are killed in their efforts to escape. Sometimes, though rarely, outside forces intervene to protect the vulnerable within the Couple Nation, and it is the oppressor who is made to leave. Often, he tries to return, to try to reclaim and reassert his sovereignty within the borders. Sometimes, unable to cope with the experience of exile, he agrees to behave better and begs to return, only to be resentful, ashamed and angry later that he has been demeaned. Rarely is he banished. With enough inducement to leave, he may go willingly, and will be welcomed by a host nation as an unencumbered male.

Women escaping violent relationships can be thought of as part of a gendered diaspora, escaping a brutal colonisation of the couple space by men. They initially are rendered homeless, displaced and then move (sometimes via the liminal space of a new relationship or safe haven) to a new homeland. Once they arrive, they may be

¹¹⁴ I move in to and out of the Papyrus font to signal the gradual development and abatement of this metaphor through the text.

given only temporary protection. The host nation, which symbolises all that is good and civilised (although it did little to protect them during the period of brutal oppression) doesn't necessarily welcome them now, even though publicly, it has declared abhorrence for the behaviour of the oppressors in the Couple Nation. There is little recognition of the torture and trauma she has experienced in her homeland and services for recovery are heavily in demand and poorly funded. She is relying on the good will of neighbours, new friends and others who like her, have fled. Often, there is pressure to return home, particularly if her behaviour in any way suggests that she is not a genuine or deserving refugee.

Some people in the host nation will be eager to listen to and understand what she has to say about her experiences and condition. They will be sympathetic to Rushdie's idea (in Bhabha, 1994) that "the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision" (p. 5). Others in the host nation will think that she has little to offer, nervous that if some have escaped, borders may be permeable after all and others may follow, causing disruption and confusion. Once free, refugees from the Couple Nation may expose how little was done to protect them and how it appeared that what went on inside the borders was minimised or even condoned, despite the rhetoric of abhorrence from outside.

And what of the violators of human rights? Recruited into the masculinist militia of the Couple Nation, what do they do when their victims flee or 'liberating forces' occupy their homes and force them to leave? Like members of other militia forces

who are accused of abuses of human rights or 'crimes against humanity' when they were doing only what those in power tacitly had deemed appropriate and even necessary to control rebelling populations, accusations of wrongdoing create confusion and threat. Often, they resist the construction of themselves as abusers, and seek to re-create the idea of themselves as protectors and providers, forcing or begging a return to the Couple Nation.

Occasionally, there is a process of truth and reconciliation whereby a truce is called within the borders or forced from without. Given the space to be forgiven and to create a non-violent identity, the violators of human rights may be permitted to stay. However, if the conditions which created and/or allowed for the violations to occur in the first place remain unchallenged, then the Couple Nation again may become a dangerous place for women to be.

Chapter coda

In this chapter, I continued the process of drawing on the participants' narratives and various texts to develop answers to the questions:

- *What possibilities are available to change existing power relations?*
- *What can be done?*

In relation to the first question, I explored structuration theory as a way of thinking about how social and cultural change may be possible. If we hold in tension a constructivist understanding of structure (Hacking, 1999) and postmodern feminist

notions around agency and subjectivity (Davies, 1991), then it becomes possible to identify ways of changing existing power relations.

In relation to the second question, my interpretation of the participants' narratives suggested to me that we may be able to respond better to domestic violence if we do the following things: facilitate new cultural practices; create new identity categories for people living in proximity to domestic violence; locate spaces for practitioners to work in and from; and create a more complex metaphor to evoke the complexity of the experiences of people living with violence in the home.

Resistance, dialogue and non-violence are cultural practices which are not new but which struggle for visibility where there is domestic violence, as they struggle for visibility in a broader Eurocentric, patriarchal, capitalist social context. If we think of subjectivity as partial and fluid, constituted and performed, then it is possible to think beyond women as victims of violence and to consider them also, as expert practitioners of resistance and survival. Similarly, the identity of men who perpetrate violence can be expanded to include the subjective position of novice practitioner of non-violence. And finally, in terms of new subjective positionings, I have considered the possible value of thinking of informal supporters and witnesses to violence as potential practitioners, to give them the status and authority to intervene where there is violence on a par with professional service providers.

I have suggested hooks' (1990) notion of homeplaces and Bhabha's (1994) notion of liminality (offering a glimpse of 'in-between' spaces) may help us locate spaces where people committed to resistance, dialogue and non-violence could work in and from to achieve their goals of preventing domestic violence and ameliorating its effects. The participants' narratives gave us glimpses of some of these spaces located within the embodied individual and civil society. Finally, I have suggested that a metaphor of migration which evokes complexity, ambivalence, liminality, danger and courage may

be useful to incorporate into the discourses of domestic violence to unsettle the simplistic victim to survivor journey metaphor which currently dominates.

Hannah's narrative is interleaved between this chapter and the next to unsettle the complex metaphor of migration away from the Couple Nation. For some women, their struggle to escape from domestic violence may be simple and straightforward.

Hannah's narrative

Well see, mine all started in when I got married the first time. I married this guy, and he abused me but he also used to do violence on my four- year old son, because he wasn't through him. But he was very cruel to him and I used to say to him you are not allowed to do that but he would say I am the main person here, you take what I say.

Before we were married you couldn't wish for a better person, but once we got married it was like you know, there was a demon or something inside of him because he just felt that he was the boss. And my son just got so scared of him, that he used to just literally stand there and wet himself. He used to shout, when you sit at this table that hand stays on the table, this hand is what you eat with, and if that hand dare move, the old steel handle knives, he used to literally rap them right across his fingers. He did more harm to my son than he did to me. He took to my son once and just belted him and the next morning when I went to dress him, all his spine was all black. He'd never do anything in front of anyone, it was always just when I was there... but he was very, very cruel, very sadistic.

He expected sex right up until the last two weeks of my pregnancy. And it was like I always used to think of him as a rooster you know ... he was there at sun-up and there at sundown, and if he came home at lunch he expected it then too. But we didn't have a proper bed to sleep on, we slept on an old flop doona thing without a bed, no mattress and he was terrible. The physical violence was just a couple of times with him, but it got so revolting. He wouldn't give me any money and he wouldn't buy any groceries. When I went to hospital there was one tin of baked beans in the cupboard. That's all I had in my cupboards. He was the type of guy who'd say you know if you want a cigarette you get three a day and that's it and I've always been a real heavy smoker. But I used to go through the fireplace and get the butts and have a couple of drags and then go up to see Dad and say Dad, give us a smoke.

Our marriage only lasted two years anyway and when I was in hospital having my second child he died - killed in a car accident. To be quite honest with you, you know this might sound horrible, and very cold but I was relieved. I used to think of ways I could do him in. I mean people said to me, when he was killed, God you're cold and I said no I'm not, if you only knew what I went through. 'Cause even at the funeral I just couldn't cry. God, it was like Christmas, you know it all come at once and I had all this money which I hadn't had in two years - I got money from social security and from welfare. I had a ball, it wasn't very much but it was something.

Chapter 5: Thesis coda

For Cortazzi (1993), the coda represents the end of the narrative where the storyteller finishes off the story and extracts herself from the storytelling process. If our shared understanding of narrative is that it plays a part in our ongoing identity formation by allowing us to perform ourselves into our own lives, then the coda is the end of one story as well as, possibly, the beginning of the next one in our biography. My narrative of the inquiry concludes with some reflections on the inquiry outcomes, while I use the space of an Epilogue to reflect on the inquiry processes, in particular my role as a researcher.

Reflecting on the study outcomes

Spivak (cited in Rossiter, 2000) explains why PM/PS theorising begs an incredulity towards the grand narratives:

The 'grands recits' are great narratives and the narrative has an end in view. It is a programme which tells how social justice is to be achieved. And I think the post-structuralists, if I understand them right, imagine again and again that when a narrative is constructed, something is left out. When an end is defined, other ends are rejected, and one might not know what those ends are. So I think what they are about is asking over and over again, what is left out. (p. 26)

From this perspective, the grand narratives (for example, Marxism, feminism, Christianity and liberalism) which are the big stories with 'an end in view', are not enough to sustain us. As Spivak explains, when an end is defined, other possible endings tend to be ignored, glossed over or 'left out'. One way around this problem may be to construct our social world through a potentially (but not necessarily) limitless

number of local, contingent and partial *micro-narratives*, which are stories with no particular predetermined ends in view.

A number of narratives emerged from the participants' stories to inform my understanding of how domestic violence affects people's lives and, therefore, how we might think about our role in responding. Firstly, there was a narrative of *pain, resistance and survival* which highlighted people's agency, expertise and capacity to survive domestic violence. Michael, who had been abusive in his relationship, spoke aspects of intense pain, resistance (to his wife leaving) and survival:

Michael: *However, one thing that I've learnt out of all this is marriage or no marriage, no-one owns anyone. And that we're all individuals and we're all on our own journey. And that, no-one has any control or ownership or power over anybody else. And that relationships and marriage is really a choice of the people involved and it is sustainable only so long as the relationship is affirming to each other. And once the relationship becomes destructive for either party, while there can be a commitment to stay, to stick together to try to work it through - and if the parties can work it through that's wonderful - I don't believe there is a binding sense of, you know, you're mine and no matter how tough or bad it gets, that's it. You're married now, end of story.*

All of the women who spoke to me from the domain of victim/survivor of domestic violence, spoke some aspects of this story. For example, towards the end of our interview, Trish told me a story illustrative of her expertise at dealing, in an ongoing way, with the fear of gendered violence:

Trish: *Women on their own do feel vulnerable. I remember when I was selling my car. ... I had to think about how to be safe, so the person doesn't just take off with the car. But I didn't feel it would be safe to go with the person taking it for a drive. I asked the police what to do and they didn't really have an answer - they just said to get a burly bloke to go with you. In the end, we decided we'd all go - my daughters too. This felt like women power. My daughters and I have learned to stick together.*

Another narrative to emerge through the participants' stories was one of *cautious optimism* about responding to domestic violence when it is witnessed or directly experienced. This narrative suggested that you could and should do something about violence but cautioned against misplaced optimism. For example, at the end of telling

his story about intervening as a bystander, Ian concluded with some evaluative comments. His tone and words suggested that he was pleased that he and the others had intervened but was not optimistic about the woman's long-term safety:

Ian: *So she received a number of messages. She received a message from me saying you know that it's really appalling what's happened and we called the police and this is just not on. There was another young guy there as well who gave a witness statement to the police so he hung around for half an hour just specifically to do that so she would have seen that. And she saw and heard from this older woman that, you know, this happens, it happened to me, I found a way out and it was worth it.*

One of the things she said to me was 'It's probably just easier if I go back' because I've got nowhere else to go'. When she said that, I just said 'It doesn't look very easy.' And she said 'No, it's not really, is it.'

I haven't heard anything more. What the police told me when I was taking the statement was he had a history of being extremely violent and that was a minor incident compared to what he'd done to her before. And yes, she was very clear about pressing charges and that he would probably receive a jail term, because there was a string of other offences that they were chasing him for as well.

A third narrative to emerge from the participants' stories was one which suggested *resignation*, either a detached resignation or a deep, abiding, resigned sadness, depending on the nature of the experience. At one end of this continuum of resignation, a representative comment might be: "This has been really annoying. We've done our best, but it has made no difference." The following extracts from my interview with Denise suggest this story:

Denise: *Kevin's view in the end was that he just wanted them to control their behaviour. We didn't necessarily think she was at risk anymore. It had been going on for so long. So then Kevin asked them to shut their back door and back windows so we couldn't hear it and they would. One time he shouted out to remind them because they'd started and we could hear it all, and they stopped and shut the back door and window.*

One Sunday morning they were being really disgusting and using really foul language. Kevin shouted out for them to close their door and they didn't so he said he was going around there. We walked around and knocked on their front door. The woman came out and said hi how are you as though we'd come for a cup of tea. I just said that the language was really unacceptable. Kevin made the point very clearly that they are to shut the back door and windows and move to the front of the house when they start fighting. They did seem to do that; then they didn't stay long after that.

At the other end of the continuum, where the violence has had devastating consequences, the sense of resignation reflects the profound loss and sadness experienced by those who have been victimised. A comment which reflects this might be “This should never, ever have happened. It will stay with us forever.” This narrative is represented in Janet’s reflections on the impact of the loss of her grandchildren:

Janet: *And people... such an event... like... it's strange how people think, because they say, it's been three years, get over it. You know it's been three years, you know, get over it. Get on with life, you know. ... They think that because it's three years, or whatever the time is, it's all forgotten, it's over, you get on with it. It's totally different to that. They don't stop to think that you never get over it. ... And it's no good people saying you know you see these other things that've happened in the Eastern States, brings back memories. I say it doesn't bring back memories, those memories are there **all the time**. It's not as though you forget about it and all of a sudden something jogs your mind and it comes back. Every day of your life, no matter where you go... There are constant reminders all the time.*

Easter. Now this wasn't so long ago, only about two or three months ago, I was in bed, and How I stopped myself from yelling out I don't know, but it was Jason's voice because when he was there, if he was in the other room and he wet his pants or whatever he did, he'd say Nanny, and I'd say what do you want darling and then I'd get up to him. And this child's voice was so real. And I was just about to yell out what do you want Jason and I woke up and I went, oh, they're not here. And I thought, my God. It was Jason yelling out Nanny. I couldn't believe it.

I mean we will never ever sell our house. I mean we've been in our house for 15 years. I love my little house. It's not a big flash house, but it's a very nice little home and I love it. And there's so many memories there of the kids. When you walk out the back door on the brickwork is the height. Cait is only there once. Every year we took the kids' height and there's their name and the date there, as they grew up. You know. There's just so many memories. I don't want another house. I don't want a big flash house or anything like that. I'm quite happy where I am.

The final narrative to emerge from the study reflects my interpretation of contemporary responses to domestic violence as they have been represented to me by the study participants, my observations and my reading of traces and texts. It is another story of *cautious optimism* where, despite radically inspired feminist theorising about domestic violence having disappeared from our talk and the police having entrenched themselves

as the lead agency responding to domestic violence (even though their response is inconsistent and most women do not report abuse), there is still hope. Most people do not condone or support the use of violence in intimate relationships even if they do not understand fully how or why it happens, or its seriousness. People do respond to domestic violence, as survivor/victims, perpetrators, neighbours, family, friends, bystanders and formal service providers. They do not always respond in ways that are helpful, but quite often, they do. Some people also have good ideas about what helpful responding might look like; for example:

So I think it needs to become more of a community issue and that kids need to be fed in schools where it can be properly covered by people who are qualified to cover all the issues - not just you know domestic violence is getting a slap around the chops now and then. It is so much more than that.

There also needs to be more written about the 'end results' for women, the success stories of women who leave violent marriages and go on to make a success of their lives because this is what often keeps women from leaving – not believing that they will be okay.

And then have an education program for family and friends that if someone talks to you about it, for God's sake, don't reject them. Accept them and say look I'm so glad you spoke to us about this. Look, if we can help in any way. And then there might need to be some practical things like counselling that need to take place.

These representations of micro-narratives have been included to support my central thesis that domestic violence is a complex, multi-dimensional *idea* and that people's experiences of it vary profoundly, depending on their domain of experience, what has happened to them and how they have made sense of these things. Domestic violence as an idea is not a single phenomenon with one set of causes or one set of workable responses. People experience the same events differently depending on where they are situated and so they speculate differently about causes and identify various possible responses. Our ability to respond usefully to domestic violence when we experience it, as a victim/survivor, perpetrator or witness, will depend on our values, skills and knowledge and where we are located in the broader ecological *nest* of the couple, extended family, neighbourhood, community or the state.

Chapter coda

In this study, I have explored the migration of people away from domestic violence; their haphazard journey 'in search of possibilities' (Altman, 2001).¹¹⁵ The research gaze has been on women who have lived with domestic violence; men who have perpetrated it; family members, neighbours and bystanders who have witnessed it, and in the Epilogue, I turn the gaze more fully onto myself as the researcher.

People's journeys of migration from one nation to another are unique, complex and contingent. At the same time, there are migratory patterns and people willingly or not, knowingly or not, can become part of a diaspora or exodus which can be measured and studied. So it is the same for people moving away from domestic violence. Each experience of domestic violence is unique, complex and contingent. At the same time, there are patterns which form, whether people are aware of them or not, and these patterns can become the subject of measurement and study. Within each story, there are aspects of the pattern but the pattern never captures fully the experiences of each individual. In this study, I have attempted to record the individual stories and to identify some patterns in the process of people migrating from places of violence to spaces where there is the possibility or the promise of no violence. I have theorised some elements of the patterning to try to develop some shared understandings about what happens when men abuse their partners and the possibilities for helping them, or making them, stop.

¹¹⁵ The possibilities for how we might respond to domestic violence are endless and in this document I have only just begun to explore them. Over the several years of this inquiry process, I found myself supporting friends who were experiencing workplace harassment and bullying and the parallels between their experiences and domestic violence were profound. The abuse of power where there are dynamics of intimacy and dependency, describes domestic violence and workplace bullying. We may be able to learn more about the possibilities for responding to domestic violence by examining its parallels with bullying in workplaces and schools. Conversely, we may be able to improve our responses to bullying by drawing on the knowledge/s which inform our responses to domestic violence.

Epilogue

The idea of feminist ethnography as reflexive interpretation was introduced in the first chapter. To recap, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) describe reflexive interpretation as a process of “reflection in research in conjunction with interpretation at several levels: contact with the empirical material, awareness of the interpretive act, clarification of political-ideological contexts, and the handling of the question of representation and authority” (p. 238). It is the last part of this process, that is, reflecting on issues of representation and authority, which I attend to in this Epilogue. In order to maintain a reflexive posture to the end of the inquiry (as much as there can be an end), I have needed to consider how my own self/subjectivity (and my power as a researcher) has affected the research process and outcomes in ways I may not yet have understood.

Maintaining reflexivity

In this section, I reflect on my values, feelings and actions (J. Allan, 2003) as they have been evidenced (at least to me) throughout the inquiry process, drawing less on the participants’ narratives and more on my journal entries as *data*.¹¹⁶ In order to give structure to my reflections, I have borrowed from Richardson’s (2000) criteria for evaluating reflexivity in postmodern ethnographies. Richardson poses a series of

¹¹⁶ Once I had begun writing the thesis document in a systematic way, I stopped using my research journal to record ideas, reflections and epiphanies. Rather, I used the thesis document itself and recorded notes and memos to myself as footnotes, and endnotes (some of which later became part of the harridan’s chorus). As the writing progressed and I moved backwards and forwards between chapters, I re-evaluated these comments and moved many of them into the first draft of this section. .

questions about the researcher as author and about the author's relationship with the inquiry process, the study participants and the text, as part of her evaluation process (p. 937). Some of her questions have been useful points for reflection in this final stage of the inquiry process.

According to Griffiths (cited in Williams, 1995), reflexivity for a feminist ethnographer is 'sensitivity to her own agenda' (§ 11). When I began this research process, my agenda was to know more about how lay helpers (as family, friends, neighbours, student/work colleagues or bystanders) could respond where there is domestic violence. As Kelly-Gadol (1987) and Harding (1987b) have recommended for feminist researchers, I had wanted to place myself on the same critical plane as the research participants, maintain a conscious partiality to women's experiences, *study up* and include men in the research so they would become visible in the problematic. My values and my understanding of critical social work practice resonated with these recommendations. As (Harding, 1987a) noted:

The questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for so-called pure truth. Instead, they are queries about how to change its conditions; how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat, or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth, or development; and so forth. (p. 8)

In undertaking this research project, I was drawn to the anarchic possibilities for practice which I suspected were embedded within postmodern theorising and I was interested to learn more about what postmodern theorising could offer social work, other disciplines and lay practitioners responding to domestic violence. Thus, my agenda was to be pragmatic about responding to domestic violence and to focus on what might be useful.

Here, I reflect on aspects of the inquiry process which I can see may have been hidden or only partly visible (to myself and the reader) in my narrative about the project. My goal is to continue processing the experience as a form of debriefing, to identify the limitations of the study and to consider whether or not this piece of work can lay claim to being a valid and reflexive representation of the inquiry process. However, in doing

this, I am mindful of Foley's (1998) caution in relation to self-disclosure in ethnographic writing:

I avoid, however, much explicit discussion about epistemological and ethical questions. I eschew such discussions because expressing philosophical scepticism seems to be a new rhetoric that is replacing the old scientific rhetoric of sample, validity, and reliability. Worrying over epistemological and representational issues has become another rhetorical convention to establish, not undermine, the author's authority. Worse still, this new rhetoric still reproduces the academic high culture. The ethnographer as sceptical philosopher-poet is some improvement over the ethnographer as objective scientist, but the agents of the academy are still doing most of the talking and writing. (p. 118)

Understanding a postmodern feminist epistemology

When I began this research project, I anticipated the inevitable question: What about the men? I knew that whenever I spoke about domestic violence publicly (and privately), I would be asked why no-one was interested in men who were being abused. How was I going to respond? How was I going to think (and write) about men who believed that they were victimised because their wives had left them? Or who felt victimised because their wives had humiliated them? Or who stayed with difficult or depressed women because they didn't want to leave the children with her and didn't want to take the children with them, either because it would make her more depressed, cost him in legal fees and/or he knew he couldn't look after them on his own, or didn't want to.^H

Of course, these are all the things that women have to think about when they are grappling with the decision to leave or stay with a violent partner. But somehow, this is forgotten. Inevitably, whenever I gave statistics on domestic violence at a talk, to show that women are overwhelmingly the primary victims of domestic abuse, someone in the audience (not always a man) would say, "But men don't report domestic violence because they are too embarrassed. As if women *do* report and as if women aren't embarrassed. Women are no less ashamed and embarrassed to admit that their partners abuse them than men are."

On the days when I could ignore these questions, I was drawn to the standpoint feminist position on violence against women (Daly, 1979; C. MacKinnon, 1987a; Mardorossian, 2002; Scutt, 1983; Yllo, 1993). I *knew* that domestic violence overwhelmingly involved male violence against known women. I *knew* that very few men experienced the kind of persistent put-downs, physical assaults, rape and torture many women endured. But no matter how often I re-told women's stories of abuse or quoted the statistics, I was not going to be believed. So my dilemma was that while I had *my truth* about this thing called domestic violence, the very people who needed to know what I knew (men who used violence and the men and women who believed women either were to blame for it or were just as bad) were not going to accept my truth about this.

So, I came to see that I needed a way of thinking and speaking about domestic violence which allowed for my version of the truth to be vulnerable, uncertain and contingent (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000). That way, people who thought differently to me might be able to hear at least some of what I had to say and hopefully, would be willing to consider that their truth similarly was vulnerable, uncertain and contingent. In privileging the voice of women to speak about domestic violence, standpoint feminism (as metanarrative) inadvertently may have defined an end point in women's stories where they are free from violence, but without necessarily exploring how we can have an end point (or any point) in men's stories where they cease to *be* violent. Male subjectivity (including its formation under patriarchy) escapes notice and the individual male identity of perpetrator takes centre stage so that again, the man is the *doer* and the woman is the one who is *done to*. Boddy (1998) has explained the limitation of standpoint feminism in this way:

Moreover, conceptualizing women as 'the dominated' and men as 'the dominators' encourages us to view men as agents, as 'having' and wielding power, and women as passive recipients of men's acts, violent or otherwise. In addition to effacing the intricacies of power noted above, this bipolar model replicates profoundly embedded Euro-American gender constructs by failing to examine them as such. (p. 79)

A postmodern feminism adopts an anti-foundationalist epistemology, replacing notions of objectivity and realism with a constructivist relativism which refuses to separate what it is that can be known from the language, interpretations and social positioning of the knower. Defending relativism, J.K. Smith and Deemer (2000) note:

For us, it is time to accept our vulnerability and contingency, drop the last traces of the epistemological project, and thus change the conversation. There is no way off of the wheel or out of the circle and, in what may seem an odd twist, in a strange way there is no epistemological crisis of representation, but only a practical and moral problem of representation. (p. 891)

Attending to Richardson's (2000) suggestions for evaluating reflexivity, in the following pages, I reflect on how I have addressed (or not) some of the practical and moral problems of representation which flowed from this postmodern feminist ethnography.

Writing the story and representations of the authorial self

The thesis document is not a spontaneous narrative of the inquiry process, but rather a considered and rehearsed one. Any surprises which were in the first telling of it (my first draft) have been absorbed into the flow of the text in this final version. So, for example, I crafted the portrayals soon after I had transcribed the interview tapes as a way of understanding participants' stories. Some of Chapter 1 had been prepared for the research proposal and then I rewrote sections to clarify some of the theories and ideas informing the beginning phases of the study. However, once I had explored what these theories and ideas meant in subsequent chapters, I had to go back to Chapter 1 and rewrite it in light of my new constructed knowledge/s. The new insights from revising Chapter 1 informed new ideas for Chapters 3 and 4 and so this iterative process has continued throughout the writing process.

Polkinghorne (1997) draws on the work of Saussure (1966) to distinguish between *synchronic* and *diachronic* textual forms of ethnographic writing. Synchronic or *same-time* representations of research findings present them without a temporal reference, and language is taken to have meaning separate from any social, political or historical

context. A diachronic representation on the other hand, reads more as a drama than a novel and as Polkinghorne has noted, such a text offers:

a sequential composition of decisions, action, change occurrences, and interactions with subjects and colleagues. Values, desires, inadequacies, skills and personal characteristics make their appearance at various points in the researcher's performance. (1997, p. 9)

This text is a mix of diachronic and synchronic form. Any knowledge claims I make here sit in the context of this [slightly] *messy text* which I have shared with the harridan and the research participants. In using a narrative structure to frame the story however, I have provided some coherency and same-time structure which belies my reality of the inquiry process. Thus, as the reader, you have to do your interpretive work of my story just as I did the interpretive work with the research participants' stories.

In order to make some of these interpretations, the reader needs to have some autobiographical material from the researcher (Cortazzi, 2001). But how much? In the Prologue, I wrote some of my personal and professional history to suggest my reasons for coming to this research topic. My other device for presenting *me* to the reader has been through the harridan's chorus. Like all of the issues defined as social problems (abuse, poverty, illness, unemployment), domestic violence is experienced firstly in the complex and embodied lives of individuals, often as pain, anger, fear or shame. As the narrator of this story, my experience of witnessing the stories of others has been sadness, anger, frustration and at other times, outrage and irony (Singer, 1992). The harridan's chorus has been my space to express some of my outrage and irony about domestic violence, in particular the role of academics and practitioners in responding to it.^H

Much of this outrage has been directed at white, male researchers who have aggressively occupied the territory of domestic violence on behalf of the state and the academy, on and off, for a long time. Victim/survivors and perpetrators have become second-class citizens in occupied territory. Of course, this analysis begs the question of what I am doing here as a privileged, white researcher writing about domestic violence for a prestigious academic product. The irony of this hasn't escaped me. It is just ironic and as it is.

Ethical issues are political issues because they are defined and resolved in contexts which are imbued with relations of power (Rossiter, Prilleltensky, & Walsh-Bowers, 2000). If we think of ethics as the rules of conduct in relation to the enactment of moral values then being *ethical* involves managing our power as research/practitioners firstly to define those moral values and then to conduct ourselves in ways which are consistent with them. It is the idea of power differentials between researchers and research participants which motivates universities and other governing bodies to protect participants from acts of omission or commission by researchers, which may cause harm. However, Rossiter et al. (2000) are interested in relations of power as they operate in *producing* “individuals and organisations in ways that limit or potentiate ethical decision-making” (p. 97). They suggest that a postmodern conception of ethics locates ethical decision-making within the broader, radical, democratic project of social justice and that it involves attention to ‘communicative process’ or dialogue.

In the context of university-sponsored research, the opportunities to *produce* radical relations of power between researchers and research participants are constrained by the rules which govern ethics approval. Even if participants give informed consent to certain procedures (for example, to be identified in a thesis document), the university reserves its right to overrule these decisions in order to protect itself. In this study, I tried to be aware of the relations of power operating between myself and the research participants and my main goal was to avoid actions which might cause harm to the participants or others.¹¹⁷ However, I also tried to involve participants in processes which they could, upon reflection, cast in a positive light. This second goal emanated from a notion that feminist research is by definition emancipatory (A Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1993; Williams, 1995) because it attempts to challenge the power relations usually produced in the context of social research. Here, I

¹¹⁷ In saying this, I’m not assuming that the participants had no power in the research process. However, I was aware that as an academic, literate and at home with the idea of social research and the university context, my power was substantial.

reflect on my efforts to do no harm to the research participants and my secondary goal (of involving participants in a process they might reflect on as positive) is explored later.

Protecting participants and others from harm

According to Lee (cited in Featherstone, 2000), *sensitive* research is “research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it” (p. 127), either because it deals with a topic which is emotionally distressing, threatens to further stigmatise or marginalise a disadvantaged group and/or conversely, threatens the interests of the powerful. Knowing how and why this piece of research was sensitive on at least the first two of Lee’s criteria, assisted in my reflections on the inquiry process.

A number of times during the interviews, the participants and I became distressed. Some of the women who had lived with violence spoke about the abuse they had experienced for the first time outside of their network of family and friends, and so I was aware that I had a particular duty of care towards them:

Barbara: *Well I’ve never actually sort of spoken about it, been to counselling. It’s just – it was all sort of hidden like when it happened to me. I’m still trying to understand why I kept hiding it from everyone else, even my own family.*

Helen: *That’s why, when I read it in the paper I thought, I’d like to see that lady if I can help. ’Cause, to be able to talk about it sometimes is better than going to counselling if you’ve got somebody whose got the time to just sit and be able to talk. It’s a lot to carry around sometimes. It’s a real big burden. And I think people should be able... I know mine might not’ve been as bad as some people get but to me, it was bad enough ’cause it’s like taking your liberty away when someone just helps himself. And I think if, if people – I mean not everybody’s like me – thank Christ they’re not sometimes ... but I reckon if they could just talk about it ... it would help.*

If the interviews had been distressing, I would contact the participants after our interview to see how they were. I had made arrangements with a specialist domestic

violence counselling service to accept referrals from me if the interviews provoked distress. However, in my efforts to normalise my relationship with the research participants and to avoid pathologising their experiences, I do not think I was proactive enough. If I was to do similar research, I would give *all* participants *written* information about the specialist counselling service (including what to say when they rang for an appointment), contact them immediately after the interview regardless of how I thought the interview had gone and invite them to an informal follow-up conversation to debrief. I also would ask participants how they would like me to describe myself if, when I telephoned, someone else answered. I recall that sometimes I was reluctant to phone participants if I was uncertain who would answer, even though all of the participants had told me that they were living safely at the time of our interview. Once I had transcribed the recorded interviews, I coded them and in some cases, crafted the portrayals before sending these documents back to participants. At the time of sending material back to participants who I thought may be vulnerable to distress, I remade the offer of counselling, recognising that the process of reading their story or even fragments of it, could provoke distress. When one of the women moved interstate, I made arrangements for a specialist agency in her region to accept a referral.

Throughout the inquiry process, I tried to stay mindful of the risks of harm for all of the research participants, but was aware at the time, as I am now, that I attended more to the potential needs of the victim/survivors of abuse than to the others. None of the participants who responded as neighbours and bystanders was distressed during the interview and for some of them, the event was well behind them at the time of the interview. I had some ongoing contact with participants who were supporting neighbours or friends at the time of our interview and/or subsequent to our interview. These contacts generally were around strategies they were using to support neighbours or friends and possible sources of referral. I had some concerns about how Sally might respond to her representation in the text as of all the participants, she was the most critical (although not unsympathetic) towards her neighbour. However, Sally did not react either to the coded transcript or to the portrayal and indicated she was happy for her material to be included in the thesis document.

I sought to protect the privacy of research participants by using pseudonyms so there was only one record of participants' names and addresses and this was kept in a locked filing cabinet. Before I posted any documents, I contacted the participants to be sure of the address and to make alternative arrangements if they didn't want the material sent through the post. However, in offering to return documents to participants, I did not appropriately consider the issue of literacy, in particular English literacy. For example, I was unable to arrange a follow-up interview with Bella and she never gave me any direct feedback on the materials. It is possible that she felt overwhelmed by the task of reading the transcript in English, something which did not occur to me at the time. For that reason, I have been cautious about how I have represented Bella in the text and have not included her portrayal.

One of my main ethical dilemmas was in relation to representing material from the talks I did during the first phase of the study. I had made journal entries after each event and made the decision to draw on my experience and interpretation of the events after I realised that they formed an important (albeit, thin) slice of the ethnographic materials. In making my decision to incorporate material from these gatherings, I was aware that they had not been private events where participants had agreed to keep the proceedings confidential. Any member of the audience could have seen what I saw and could have spoken it on to others. Fine (1992) has argued that it may be appropriate for researchers to use material which they have obtained 'opportunistically' if they respect the integrity of the informants. In part, because of this ethical dilemma, I chose to use a poetic style for the representation of these experiences to mask the events and people and also to encourage ambiguity about whether the representations were fictional, factual or both.

Throughout the inquiry process, I was aware of my obligations towards people who were being represented by the research participants, such as the partners of participants, formal service providers and neighbours who were being described and discussed. In representing these people, I made judgements about the appropriateness of representing them in particular ways. As Lee (cited in Featherstone, 2000) considers a topic is sensitive if potentially it further stigmatises an already oppressed or marginalised group,

I decided that unless it was relevant to mention the ethnicity or sexual orientation of a 'third person' I would not.

Researcher – research participant relationship

Stacey (1991) has challenged the long held view that feminist researchers can avoid objectifying women as subjects of research by engaging with them as equals in the endeavour (Oakley, 1981; Mies & Shiva, 1993). Stacey's argument is that the researcher has more power than the research participants to determine the ongoing nature of any relationship and allowing close informal relationships based on reciprocity to develop can lead to participants disclosing more than they want to, resulting in confusion and unfulfilled expectations on the part of the participants.

In undertaking this research, I was aware of Oakley's (1981) express advice about mutuality in feminist research relationships, particularly as it relates to relationships with women. I felt that it was appropriate to extend the requirement to all research participants, regardless of gender, and I was also aware of Stacey's critique of Oakley's position. Although I was undertaking an ethnographic study, my involvement with the research participants was limited to one or two formal interviews, some phone calls and some informal contact to discuss issues of representation in the thesis document. I was aware of my responsibilities to the research participants and if they contacted me for information or to discuss what was happening in relation to people they were assisting, I was interested and willing to be involved. I saw that I had invited myself into people's lives and that the relationships would follow whatever trajectory was deemed appropriate by the participants and myself.

Stacey's (1991) critique has unsettled the notion that mutuality and respect in the researcher-researched relationship may be enough to protect research participants from the effects of unequal power relations. As Tucker (1998) has noted:

The poststructuralist approach [to research] sensitizes the researcher to his/her role in structuring and, indeed, dominating the very groups that s/he studies.

From this postmodern perspective, almost any sort of research involves a power imbalance, and is therefore suspect. (p. 55)

Granted, as most research participants are unfamiliar with the context and nuances of university-sponsored social research, this may limit their power to negotiate issues of interpretation and representation and so suspicion on the part of the researcher towards their own motivation is appropriate. However, the power differences between the researcher and researched will not always be unidirectional or the consequence of any one factor. From my own perspective in the inquiry process, the extent to which our various subjectivities were classed, racialised, gendered or ascribed (for example victim/survivor, researcher, neighbour, perpetrator), was more likely to affect our sense of power/lessness in the relationship than simply our role as either the researcher or research participant (Pettman, 1992).

Author subjectivity as producer and product

In this section, I reflect on the ways in which my own subjectivity simultaneously has created and been created by the inquiry; through the processes of gathering the ethnographic materials, interpreting and analysing them and writing the various texts (poems, portrayals, chapters) for the thesis document.

Author subjectivity as producer

How has my own subjectivity/sense of self affected the inquiry process and thesis document? In writing this narrative, I have recognised elements of what Gergen (2001) describes as a 'womanstory'. Gergen draws on Gilligan's understandings of male and female moral development, to note that "manstories seem to celebrate the song of the self" (p. 65). By contrast, in womanstories "achievement is described in relational terms, with more stress on mutuality than supremacy" (p. 64). However, in this document, my harriidan's chorus has unsettled this gendered dichotomy. Through the chorus, I have exposed my more masculine subjectivity in that my subtext resonates with Gergen's description of manstories, where we find a narrator such as myself

“becoming their own heroes, facing crises, following their quests, and ultimately achieving victory” (p. 61).

The harridan’s chorus notwithstanding, this story of the inquiry process is, overall, a womanstory. I have tried to position myself alongside the research participants; on the same critical plane as Kelly-Gadol (1987) has suggested. Gergen (2001) notes that the womanstory “emphasizes continuity with others’ goals, not opposition to them” (p. 64) and I can see how I have tried to align my goals for the research (to find better ways of responding to domestic violence, to do no harm and to offer a potentially positive experience with research) with what I assume might have been the goals of the research participants. To claim ‘success’ however, I would have needed to enter into a more dialogical process with the research participants, to find out what their goals for participating in the research might have been and whether or not we had achieved them. As it was, some of them had told me of their motivation during our interview. For example, most of the women who came forward for the study, who had experienced violence in their relationships, wanted to *make a difference* by participating in the research. They wanted to speak, through me, to other women, to workers and to policy makers to say how the abuse had been for them, how they understood their experiences now and/or how things could or should have been different for them:

Geraldine: *I wanted to be involved because I feel I’ve got a little bit to offer and I think lots of little bits will come together and make a big picture for people. I was a victim of domestic violence probably most of life. I don’t want other people to have to go through what I had to go through all of my life ... so anything that I might be able to do as a way of helping other women to not have to go through that is a positive thing. I hope you go from being a victim then to being some ways a bit more in control.*¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ In a follow-up conversation, Geraldine said that being a study participant had been significant for her. She said she had valued being taken seriously during the interview and that her experiences and actions had been validated by having someone who was seen as knowledgeable listen to her and ‘write it down’.

Similarly, for Michael, his participation in the study stemmed from his willingness to share his experiences for others' benefit.

Michael: *Well first of all let me say I want my contribution to this effort to contribute to us learning how we can educate people better to avoid getting themselves into dynamics with their partners that lead to emotions that explode into domestic violence. And, that I'm keen to also contribute to ways of learning and informing people in terms of what might help before one gets to the point where one needs intervention from official services. Yes, so there you are.*

Thus, I have some confidence that the research at least was not in opposition to the likely goals of the research participants when they first engaged with the research process.

Throughout the inquiry process, I tried to enact reflexive interpretation by being aware of my own claims to authority, in particular how these affected the recruitment of research participants and the selection of texts for interpretation and analysis (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 250). Gaps and omissions in the thesis document reflect the ways in which my subjectivity and claims to authority determined the direction and focus of the research gaze. Firstly, my identity/subjectivity influenced who was going to be recruited as a research participant. As a white woman, most likely I was going to attract people into the study who were white or female. Not surprisingly, I did. Secondly, my subjectivity inevitably was going to influence which aspects of the interview text I would focus on (and which ones I would ignore) during the process of interpretation and analysis.

Possibly (although not necessarily) as a consequence of the process I used to recruit participants, there were none who identified as Indigenous Australians, who experienced disability or who made it known that they were same-sex attracted. As far as I knew, there was only one person in the study who was under the age of 30. At the beginning of the inquiry process, I made some specific attempts to recruit Indigenous people and young people into the study, something which had been recommended during my proposal presentation. There had been few (if any) young or Indigenous people in the church groups, classes and service clubs I had been invited to speak to

during the first phase of the study. The research design was emergent and so (as well as aiming for diversity among research participants), I was also open to the idea of developing a collaborative inquiry process within the broader ethnographic design if an existing group had wanted to participate (Reason, 1988).

At an information session about the study I held with local service providers, a representative of the regional Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) had asked me why I thought the project would be relevant to Indigenous people. My response was recorded in the following journal entry:

May 2, 2001

What does the study mean for Aboriginal people? How is it relevant? My response [today] was that I had acknowledged in the proposal that as a white woman and a social worker I could not expect that people from different cultural backgrounds to me (class, race, gender) would necessarily want to talk to me. I was not going to actively canvass Aboriginal people to be a part of the study for two reasons. One, I could not confidently say that they could trust me to be of use to them or that they could trust me to represent them faithfully (even though I would try to do this by going back to them with material before I used it in a thesis document). Secondly, I have a concern that this study could co-opt, or be seen to co-opt, Aboriginal ways of doing things as Aboriginal people have already demonstrated their capacity to think beyond the technical/rationalist response to domestic violence and thus the role of the fourth sector in intervention (e.g., with the Let's Not Blame project).¹¹⁹ Having said that I would very much like to include Aboriginal people in the study and will be open to how I might do this in ways that avoid the problems I've noted.

The AMS worker subsequently arranged for me to speak with youth workers in her organisation to discuss possibilities for participation. She also arranged for me to attend

¹¹⁹ The *Let's Not Blame* project was developed by the regional AMS and takes a broad communitarian justice approach to responding to Indigenous family violence, locating the violence within the context of colonisation and dispossession.

a combined Indigenous agencies' meeting to explain the research and invite participation. I made a similar attempt to involve young people in the study by speaking to a combined youth agencies' meeting. However, no proposals for inclusion in the study, either by individuals or groups, emerged from these approaches.

When I reflect on my journal entry as a response to the AMS worker's questions, I can see that my focus was more on giving her reasons why Indigenous people should not be recruited rather than answering her question about what it might mean for them if they were. On reflection, I think that at the time, I was ambivalent about engaging with Indigenous people on the issue of family violence. I intended for my approaches to them to be respectful but cautious, wanting to reduce any burden Indigenous people might feel in refusing the offer to *do research*, while at the same time feeling nervous about my abilities to manage issues of authority and representation with the sensitive topic of family violence in Indigenous communities if they accepted. In acting as I did, I was trusting that my prior relationships with the people I was approaching (for example, the AMS worker) could act as a container for the *dialogic space* which I envisaged I was creating as a precursor to any formal research space. However, my approaches could have been read as ambiguous, or tokenistic, as to some extent, they were. In thinking that I needed to protect Indigenous people from researchers and academics like myself, I typically assumed my privilege and minimised their agency.

Pettman (1992), referring to Huggins, has noted that "Aboriginal women in particular are used to intrusions and make informed judgements about who to talk with and what to say" (p. 146). In hindsight, my concerns about co-opting Indigenous ways of responding to domestic violence (for example, in relation to restorative justice), seem odd. More obvious to me now is the issue of whether or not (and if so how) an outsider usefully could witness, theorise and represent contested positions within any

marginalised community, on an issue like family violence.¹²⁰ While acknowledging the risks and vulnerabilities of Indigenous people allowing non-Indigenous people to do research in their communities, Pettman (1992) notes that there are also disadvantages in leaving Indigenous people out of mainstream research efforts:

Any serious attempt to add in women or race or cultural difference will unsettle mainstream ways of knowing, and subvert central concepts and categories. If the search is pursued, the consequent unravelling and reconnecting will reveal the constitutive and interactive nature of the social relations of difference – relations that are simultaneously gendered, racialised, ethnically-located and classed. (p. 134)

It is possible that my caution about involving Indigenous people in the research was about me wanting to avoid the inevitable ‘unravelling’ as much as anything else.

While I was cautious about approaching Indigenous people to be involved in the study, I was not so cautious about involving my gendered other. Although I was aware that there would be cultural differences between me as a researcher and any men who participated in the study, I actively sought male participation. Unlike Indigenous people who discursively are positioned with ‘normalised absence/pathological presence’ (Phoenix cited in Pettman, 1992, p. 35), it seems to be the reverse for men, who have a ‘normalised presence/pathological absence’ in the context of researching and theorising about domestic violence.

While I consider all of my decisions in relation to interpretation, analysis and representation in the thesis document to have been *subjective*, I made some subjective decisions in relation to gender which warrant additional reflection. For example, I intentionally avoided reference to fragments from interview transcripts which referred to the infidelity of a third party because each time it was mentioned in the interviews, it was

¹²⁰ The issue of Indigenous family violence was highlighted in Western Australia in 2002 with the release of the *Western Australian State Government's Action Plan for Addressing Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). The Gordon inquiry had been established following a coronial inquiry into the death of a young teenage girl which suggested that violence and abuse was ‘endemic’ in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

mentioned as a possible explanation for a man's violence. I chose not to explore this issue within the body of the thesis where I was representing participants' experiences and understandings, although it seems appropriate to mention it here. In making the decision, I was conscious that infidelity has been identified as the main circumstance under which a significant number of people (men and women) consider it acceptable for a man to assault his wife (Public Policy Research Centre, 1988). I was keen to avoid giving readers of this document the same opportunity. My thinking around this had also been influenced by findings from Patton's (2003) research. She found that a substantial number of women considered a new partner to have been a key pathway to them leaving a violent relationship. This finding suggests that infidelity can be constructed in the context of resistance to abuse and strategising to escape rather than simply as provocation to the abuse.

In writing the thesis document, I often was aware of how difficult it was to express concern or sympathy for perpetrators of abuse without feeling disloyalty to their female victims. Similarly, I found it difficult to describe women's violence or manipulation of men (even when I had positioned it in the context of resistance) without feeling as though I was betraying women who were victim/survivors of violence. Within a binary structuralist frame, the subject victim cannot simultaneously be the subject perpetrator (Chung, 2001/2002) and yet victims do perpetrate abuse (McHugh & Hewitt, 2000; Card 2002) and perpetrators may suffer as a consequence of women's resistance or revenge. Feminists' fear about naming violence perpetrated by women is well founded, given the persistent attempts to equate the frequency and severity of women's violence in the home with that of men (for example, George, 2002; Sarantakos, 1999; Sarantakos, 2004). Although I found it difficult to discuss women's violence towards men (for example when Eileen described leaving her husband without medical attention after she had hit him), I did not intend to censor the document around this issue in the same way that I intended to censor it around ethnicity and sexual activity.

Author subjectivity as product

Some of my most profound learning from this inquiry process has been around the notion of subjectivity and self. My first attempts to write about this ground to a dramatic halt.

August 6, 2003

I've had to stop the writing. Accept that this writing project will be 'impure' (Trinh, 1992). No-one needs to know the intricacies of post-Enlightenment notions of the self. I don't. Who knows exactly how our sense of self develops? Our sense of others? It seems most likely that it happens through a combination of things, like our relationships with others as they represent to us who we are through our perception of their perception of us. Cooley had this idea back in 1902. More recently, it has been suggested that our sense of who we are develops from our self reflections off/within our relationships in the context of culture, discourse and institutional practices

I am my/self. (I've done it. I've fiddled with a word!)
How I think about my/self, my subjectivity
Forms my identity.
How others think about my/self, their subjectivity
Forms my identity too.

What if they don't match up?
Does it matter?
Not to me it doesn't. Much.
It could matter though.
If I cared what they thought.
If I had to care because they had control.
Of my livelihood. My soul.

My identity is useful.
It says who I am, to the outside world.
And to me.
I am a woman. A social worker. A mother.
I can use it to join up with others.
We are women. Social workers. Mothers.

Or, maybe,
We are victims. Of abuse. Of murder.
Supporters. Of other women. Of our children.
Wives. Badly done by.
Neighbours. Bothered and annoyed.
Social workers. Wanting to help.
Men. In pain. Dangerous. Ashamed.

As I became clearer about PM/PS ideas on subjectivity and identity formation, conventional notions of the unitary self were unsettled and I could see the possibilities for emancipation if we consider that people simultaneously create and are created by discourse (as language, culture, structure, practices) which itself changes and is changed by those same structures and processes. Some feminists are nervous about the influence of poststructuralism on radical feminism, suggesting that it works against an emancipatory and progressive politics (Epstein, 1999). However, like Solas (2002), Trainor (2002) and some of my other Australian social work contemporaries, Epstein seems to disown her own agency. Just because postmodernism challenges essentialist theories doesn't mean that we have to eschew essentialist politics. As Weldon (1984) said: "We can do as we like" (p. 354).

My experience of undertaking this research, interpreting and analysing participants' experiences, affirmed my radically inspired postmodern feminism. I have a stronger understanding and respect for resistance as a personal and political strategy and I am more confident about challenging men's *bad behaviour* because I no longer feel responsible for understanding or explaining it. In relation to working with men, I am clearer now that it is enough if I support men of goodwill to do their work with other men (whose goodwill is radically underdeveloped), rather than thinking I have to do that work myself.

Accountability to the participants' standards of knowing and telling

I had felt uncomfortable with the kind of narrative analysis which interprets meaning through the structure of fragments of the narrative rather than respecting the narrator's view of the purpose of the telling; that is, for their story to be heard and taken seriously. In this inquiry process, participants had signed consent forms which explained that the research was about the role of informal helping where there is domestic violence. In response to an open-ended introduction, they told me stories about their experiences

with domestic violence, not just about the role of informal helping. It seemed to me that it would be inappropriate to interpret their material in a way which sought to understand *them* rather than what they had told me about responding to domestic violence. In this way, I tried to be accountable to the participants' understanding of what their involvement in the research was about.

Epstein (1999) is critical of the influence of poststructural theory on feminism because of its anti-essentialist position, and also because of:

the subculture that has developed around feminist poststructuralism and the intellectual world with which it intersects. Sophistication is understood to mean agility within a complex intellectual structure, the ability to engage in theoretical pyrotechnics, to intimidate others by a display of erudition. The avoidance of naïve sincerity or 'innocence' and the pursuit of ironic detachment produces a tone of superiority, a tendency to sneer at other views and other cultural orientations. ... Despite the centrality of the concept of discourse, there is little discomfort with the jargon-ridden style that tends to restrict discussion to the initiated. (p. 44)

However, while she makes a valid point, Epstein's singling out of feminist poststructuralism for criticism seems unfair. Her comments could be directed towards much (if not most) of the intellectual work produced in academia, including much of the intellectual work done in the name of radical progressive politics. It is a common contradiction for people working in radical politics that we obtain our credibility and much of our energy from an engagement with esoteric theorising. This document has been written for examination within an academic context and as a consequence, much of the language is arcane and may be inaccessible to some of the people who contributed to it. The harrikan's chorus deliberately promotes an element of ironic detachment which could be read as superiority and so for these reasons, this piece of work may not meet the criteria of being accountable to the participants' standards of knowing and telling. Or would it? I would need to have more conversations with the participants to know for sure.

It seems to me, I have reached the limits of my ability to be reflexive in relation to the inquiry process because I have reached the limits of my representation of my dialogue with the research participants.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Non-foundationalist theorising: Critical social science and postmodernism/poststructuralism

Appendix B: The Power and Control Wheel

Non-foundationalist theorising: Critical social science and postmodernism/poststructuralism

Critical social science

Fay (1987) distinguished between *critical social science* and *critical theory* reserving the term critical theory, or Critical Theory, for those ideas which emanated from the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and its ensuing connection with neo-Marxist theories and critiques of capitalism. He used the term critical social science as a looser and more encompassing term to refer to a range of social scientific theories (not just those linked with the Frankfurt School), and defined the term as follows:

In the broadest terms, critical social science is an attempt to understand in a rationally responsible manner the oppressive features of a society such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves. (p. 4)

Key names associated with the Critical Theory tradition emerging from the Frankfurt School were Horkheimer, Marcuse, Adorno and Fromm. They had been inspired by the work of Marx, Weber, Kant, Hegel and Freud and in turn, they inspired a large number of contemporary theorists such as Habermas, Deetz, Lasch and Fay (Agger, 1998; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Kincheloe, 1998). Critical Theory generally is viewed as a stable of emancipatory theories which can guide action by exposing the structures in society which, through particular ideologies, restrict and constrain the human subject. Among other things, the Frankfurt School critical theorists attacked the distortion of *value-free science* which had become “a tool of domination in the hands of technocratic and capitalist elites” (M. Peters, 1996, p. 10). They were critical of the way needs and desires were manufactured in the interests of capital through the mass media and marketing, for the purpose of increasing consumption and thereby profit (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 113).

However, a consequence of *critical theory* being used to refer to the specific theories from the Frankfurt School (and to the raft of critical social science theories which interrupt and impose limits on taken-for-granted ideas about society), has been that important antecedents to contemporary critical social science, which pre-dated the Frankfurt School, have become invisible. They include in particular, feminist writings beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft and including Eleanor Marx, Olive Schreiner and Elsie Parsons (Showalter, 2001).

According to Wexler (1991), the 'passion' for critical social science theory came to the fore in the West in the 1960s and 1970s because of its ability to give voice to radical movements representing New Left and other transformative ideals, although this has waned since the rise of the New Right in the 1980s. Critical social science theories are theories of emancipation, thought to inform a range of contemporary theoretical positions and social movements such as the feminisms, gay and lesbian liberation, environmentalism, neo-Marxism and critical pedagogy. According to Luke (1991), critical social science theory is radical and:

must advance a systematic radical critique of society, demystifying how power, position, and privilege relate to class, group and personal inequalities. By elaborating this ideally open-ended and changing critique with an interest in human enlightenment and emancipation, critical [social science] theorists can provide some guideposts for the actual resistance groups always forming at the margins of society. (p. 22)

hooks (2000b) argues that to simplify the issue of naming the different transformative ideologies and *isms*, we should just bring them all under the umbrella term *feminism*.

At the heart of critical social science theory is a commitment to transform society through some form of enlightened communication and sustained action. Fay (1993) has outlined how his version of Critical Theory, as an engaged, emancipatory and transformative social project, is enacted. The process begins, according to Fay (1993), with something perceived as a crisis in the social system. A theory of this crisis is developed which acknowledges, on the part of members of the dissatisfied group, a false consciousness which is 'amenable to the process of enlightenment'. The process

of enlightenment leads to emancipation “in which a group, empowered by its new-found self-understanding, radically alters its social arrangements and thereby alleviates its suffering” (p. 36). Manias and Street (2000) identify a similar process whereby false consciousness, a theory of the crisis, education and a detailed plan of action for change are enacted together to achieve transformation (p. 51).

The emancipatory project of critical social science theory has been located within the rational and progressive domain of a modernist social science. For example, Habermas’ notion of communicative action (cited in M. Peters, Hope, Marshall, & Webster, 1996), proposed a process of sincere communication and rational argument achieved through ‘speech acts’ and ‘ideal speech situations’ in order to provide the techniques and space for effective dialogue around contested issues, particularly in a modern, pluralistic society. However, like Fay’s prescription for enlightenment and emancipation, the Habermasian notion of communicative action presents as idealistic and overly rational. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) note in relation to Habermas:

His whole project can be summarized as an attempt to investigate and support the possibilities of critical reason in a world where, paradoxically, the dominating perceptions of rationality can be regarded as the greatest threat to reason. (p. 122)

Communicative action is problematic from a poststructuralist perspective which recognises that our thinking has been so shaped by dominant power structures and processes, that any attempts at *true* communication will be thwarted by our unwitting collusion with particular discursive practices (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001). What can count as knowledge to be exchanged and debated, will also have been distorted by an over-reliance on a particular form of knowledge production (positivism), which it has been assumed, can be applied to our understanding of the social world and human interaction (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Flyvbjerg urges a return to the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* which “goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know-how (*techne*) and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor” (p. 2). According to Flyvbjerg, there needs to be a process for balancing instrumental

rationality with value rationality which means holding onto an emancipatory vision by going beyond standpoint critical theory to locate ideas that can incorporate greater degrees of complexity and uncertainty. Enter PM/PS¹²¹ and what Flyvbjerg (2001) recognises as the goal of Foucault's work, namely:

to help restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis. (p. 4)

Postmodernity and PM/PS

Modernity and postmodernity are terms generally taken to refer to a time period or epoch. According to Sarap (1993) "modernity can be taken as a summary term, referring to that cluster of social, economic and political systems brought into being in the West from somewhere around the eighteenth century onwards" (p. 130). For Giddens (in Giddens & Pierson, 1998), the term is shorthand for modern society or industrial civilisation. The word postmodernity (not often used outside academia) generally refers to the current period or epoch, dominated by a form of fast or advanced capitalism with its attendant notions of globalisation, (as well as) locality, post-Fordism, new technologies and challenges to the integrity and certainty of the nation state (Leonard, 1997).

If we consider postmodernity in spatial rather than just temporal terms, it can refer to a cultural, social, political and economic landscape, viewed as beyond or outside modernity rather than simply after modernity. Here, it becomes synonymous with the term postmodern/ism and can be considered as operating in time *and* space alongside, around and before and after modernity/modernism so the contested idea that we somehow have shifted through one period to another is put aside. As Trinh (1992) notes:

¹²¹ Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) use PM/PS as shorthand for postmodernism/poststructuralism.

postmodernism cannot be reduced to something that merely comes *after* modernism or to a simple rejection of modernism. As some theorists argue, it can point back to a nascent stage of modernism, a dawning stage before the closure, in other words, a stage in between closures. (p. 152)

Poststructuralism and postmodernism form two distinct, but related bodies of social theorising. Best and Kellner (1991) have described poststructuralism as a 'part of the matrix of postmodern theory' and like a number of other theorists (Roseneau, 1992; Carter, 1998a; Richardson, 2002), have suggested that poststructuralism forms one of several schools of thought within postmodernism. A number of social science and social work theorists, including Best and Kellner, Rosenau, Pease and Fook (1999) and B. Fawcett and Featherstone (2000), use the terms interchangeably, albeit with some reservations. For the purposes of this study, I follow Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) who suggest that the differences between the meanings are not substantive and "so all efforts to divide up the intellectual world into PS and PM will be of limited value" (p. 150).

At its most basic level, PM/PS unsettles the technically rational and progressive project of the Enlightenment in a similar but more complex way to the critical theorists. The rational, modern view of society is replaced with a more anarchic view of social, economic, cultural and political life so that ideas about these aspects of human life can become more fragmented, localised, contingent, hesitant, and emergent (Fook, 1996). PM/PS theorising critiques the idea of objectively defined, universal truths and challenges the idea that humanity can (or will) progress to some ideal end point with the aid of bureaucracy, science, order and rationality. The theorising unsettles the rigid dualisms and polarities of modernist ways of thinking which have a tendency to construct phenomena and experiences as either/or; for example, male/female, private/public, violent/non-violent, victim/perpetrator, with limited scope for a both/and perspective. PM/PS theorising suggests that a both/and perspective may better allow for paradox and contradiction to form part of our understanding of complex human experience of and in the social world.

In relation to ideas of personhood and agency, PM/PS theories tend to undermine the notion of the self as an autonomous and self-determining subject and suggest that the self may be thought of as “tied by power/knowledge to an identity which makes us governable” (Marshall, 1996, p. 123). PM/PS theorising challenges the notion of identity based on a dualistic subjectivity framed as *not the other* (Butler, 1990; Davies, 1991). This subsequently undermines the easy possibility of a politics of identity based on differences of class, race, gender and experience. Thus, from a PM/PS perspective, it is not so easy to speak with certainty of the experiences of victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

As its own emerging discourse, PM/PS creates a sense of what can be known and what is worth knowing while, at the same time, problematising the very concept of what it is that counts as knowledge. In this way, it provides another lens for discovering, understanding and explaining certain phenomena, firstly by shaping who or what it is that will be the subject of the gaze. PM/PS theorising critiques the idea of positivist science as the only legitimate source of knowledge and encourages the idea that empirical work can be valid and rigorous without being objective, essentialist or representational (White, 1992b). This has paved the way for approaches to research which seek out and *give voice to* individuals who in the past may have been observed, studied and measured (and possibly pitied or pathologised) but without an opportunity to present their own version of the events which shape their lives. PM/PS theorising has also contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between academic disciplines so that as Seidman (1994) has noted, ‘hybrid knowledges’ such as feminism, lesbian and gay studies, ethnic, urban, and cultural studies have now emerged (p. 2). As a consequence, research projects (like this one), are more likely to be undertaken as interdisciplinary projects, working across disciplines and with hybrid methodologies.

Much of what is written about PM/PS refers directly or alludes to its ambiguous status in the academic world. The terms are highly contested and concise definitions are hard to come by. Of postmodernism, Carter (1998) has noted:

It comes down to us as both a reductionist appellation, a dense ball of complex meanings, and also an exploded term in which definitional clarity has been lost.

.... At times it can feel like walking through a multihued fog in which you occasionally bump your shin on a sharply defined object. (p. 9)

Thus, not only is there uncertainty about the exact meaning of PM/PS, but there is also no certainty about whether or not PM/PS is a good thing. For some, it is simply another grand narrative (albeit one which debunks grand narratives); a way of thinking about the social world which unsettles and destabilises the rigid codes of structuralism. From this perspective, PM/PS is exciting in its potential for the acceptance of new (and old) ideas. For others, PM/PS represents careless philosophy with the potential (much already realised) for pandering to conservative elements with its self-absorbed nihilism.

A major contributor to ideas around PM/PS, Foucault (1926-1984) investigated the ways in which claims to truth or knowledge intersect with power to create discourses around particular subjects, which then in turn determine what can be claimed as truth. According to Carabine (1998):

Discourses are historically variable ways of specifying knowledges and truths, whereby knowledges are produced as 'truths'... Discourses function as sets of socially and historically constructed rules designating 'what is' and 'what is not'. (p. 125)

By identifying the ways in which institutions (such as government departments, prisons or schools) and disciplines (such as medicine, law or social work) establish and maintain authority, Foucault exposed how he saw the relationship between the individual subject and the various discourses which make up society. Foucault made no distinction between the intent or goodness of any particular discourse, leaving it up to individual practitioners and researchers to do the work of investigating discourses and the practices of discourse formation (Marshall, 1996; McNay, 1994).

There has been a stand against PM/PS theorising by theorists such as Fay (1996), Brodribb (1992) and Agger (1990), who have viewed PM/PS as a threat to emancipatory theorising and practice. Similarly, in social work, PM/PS ideas have been rejected by those who see them as relativist, naive and dangerous (Peile &

McCouat, 1997; Solas, 2002; Trainor, 2002). By asserting there are no universal truths in the social world and that our emancipatory actions might be (or become) as oppressive and rigid as those they claim to challenge, PM/PS can give support to conservative voices which claim that the truths about racial, class or gender oppression are exaggerated, distorted or fabricated. Thus, Brodribb (1992), describing postmodernism as the 'cultural capital of late patriarchy' has noted:

It [PM/PS] is unexceptional, unoriginal and but for its hegemony, uninteresting. I define poststructuralism/postmodernism as a neurotic symptom and scene of repression of women's claims for truth and justice. Postmodernism is the attempted masculine ir/rationalization of feminism. (p. 20)

With the dismissal of grand narratives, the fear is that our notion of society may collapse into a form of localised relativism, with the Enlightenment ideals of justice, freedom and the preservation of human rights, undermined. This is of particular concern to feminist theorists, researchers and activists (Brodribb, 1992; Francis, 2000), who like Ramazanoglu (1993), have noted that:

Just as feminism is becoming a significant intellectual force in the production of knowledge, it is in danger of being thwarted by an elitist, but academically respectable, relativism and pluralism which ignores gender, disempowers women and diminishes differences. Feminists need to take seriously the political use Foucault's thought can be put to, and the possible uses of his work in supporting male dominance by ignoring 'gender' in social relations, and appearing to rise above the political implications of social divisions between women. (p. 8)

Thus, while Best and Kellner (cited in Capper, 1998) have demonstrated a tolerance for PM/PS, acknowledging its contribution to theorising, they have made a strong case for its infusion with critical theory:

We find pure postmodern theory without a strong dose of feminist or Marxism to be incapable of addressing concrete political problems. Postmodern theory in its more extreme forms tends to be exactly what it accuses modern theory of being: one-sided, reductionist, essentializing, excessively prohibitive ... politically disabling ... reductive [and] dogmatically closed to competing perspectives. (p. 369)

On the surface then, critical emancipatory theories and PM/PS present two very different ways of looking at the world. Is it desirable or possible to reconcile them? Do we continue to work with the emancipatory (for some), transformative discourse of critical theory which locates the power within certain structures such as capitalism and patriarchy and seeks to challenge these structures head on? Or, do we reject this and adopt a relativist and potentially conservative PM/PS position which argues that power exists in the various discourses which are forever being created and which have their own totalising capacity, even if they are the *good* discourses of socialism, feminism, environmentalism or gay liberation?

Rosenau (1992) and others (B. Fawcett & Featherstone, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) explain how this dilemma can be resolved by identifying two kinds of postmodern theory: skeptical/ludic/reactionary postmodernism and affirmative/oppositional/resistant postmodernism. The skeptics use the notion of multiple realities and contested discourses to arrive at a largely nihilistic position, which abandons the notion of an active subject and with it any attempt to locate moral imperatives. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) describe ludic postmodernism as an approach “that is decidedly limited in its ability to transform oppressive social and political regimes of power” (p. 294). By contrast, the affirmative/oppositional postmodernists are viewed as more pluralist than relativist and:

seek a philosophical and ontological intellectual practice that is nondogmatic, tentative, and nonideological. These post-modernists do not, however, shy away from affirming an ethic, making normative choices, and striving to build issue-specific political coalitions. (Rosenau, 1992, p. 15)

However, a consequence of this kind of differentiation has been a tendency for an affirmative PM/PS to be co-opted by critical social theorists such as Fay (1996), Kincheloe (1998), Agger (1998), and Kincheloe and McLaren (2000). Kincheloe (1998) has identified poststructuralism and postmodernism alongside the Frankfurt School as important antecedents to contemporary critical theory. In a similar way, Fay (1996) uses the term ‘multiculturalism’ to suggest a form of pluralism which can take account of the PM/PS critiques of critical theory. In discussing the use of critical theory

to inform education research, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) write about a “reconceptualised, end-of-century critical theory that has been critiqued and overhauled by the ‘post-discourses’ of the last quarter of the 20th century” (p. 281) but in their reconceptualised critical theory, they sidestep the inherent relativism of PM/PS and embrace an easier-to-deal-with pluralism. Thus, in introducing their notion of critical emancipation, they continue to assume some kind of central truth around which difference must position itself:

At the beginning of the new millennium we are cautious in our use of the term *emancipation* because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her. Also, many have questioned the arrogance that may accompany efforts to emancipate ‘others’. These are important criticisms and must be carefully taken into account by critical researchers. Thus, as critical inquirers who search for those forces that insidiously shape who we are, we respect those who reach different conclusions in their personal journeys. (p. 282)

My question is: Different from what or whom? Is it just different from them? Or do Kincheloe and McLaren assume there is a more central, more certain centre from which others, respectfully, will be allowed to deviate? ^H Later in this same piece, they write:

the postmodern critique can extend the project of an emancipatory democracy and the schooling that supports it by promoting new understandings of how power operates and by incorporating groups who had been excluded because of race, gender, or class. (p. 295)

Fancy critiquing Kincheloe and McLaren. Who do I think I am? Who am I to think I understand this critical theory and PM/PS thing anyway? Maybe I'm just jealous? Do I resent their amazing capacity to write? Their ability to pull together so many ideas into something which is incredibly coherent? You bet I do! But I am also really annoyed that these guys might be using their position and prestige to undermine the liberating potential that is embedded within a relativist PM/PS. Where is their reflexivity about their white, male privilege? Before I leave this though, I have a story to tell. In 2000, Peter McLaren visited Western Australia and gave a lecture which was videotaped. In the lecture, he talked about his Zapatista tattoo and how some of his Zapatista ‘brothers’ resent him for wearing it. He wants to be with them in their struggle. Why won't they let him? I'm amazed. He seems hurt that they don't want him in their struggle, in their space. Doesn't he get it? He can't just waltz in and claim it. He is a powerful Gringo. He is part of the problem whether he likes it (and thinks it) or not. Maybe he does get it and it's me who doesn't get it. I don't know. And I won't ever know unless we have a dialogue. But then, I bet I would have to initiate it and wouldn't that be doing his work for him?

Again, my question is: Incorporating them into what? Here, I read Kincheloe and McLaren as assuming a space where 'emancipatory democracy' happens (a space which they seemingly occupy or at least have visited) into which these previously excluded groups can now be included. What if this isn't the space which these 'groups' (in all their apparent sameness) want to occupy? What if they want to create a new space? What if they want to exclude Kincheloe and McLaren and people like me because they don't think we belong? What will an emancipatory, democratic project look like then?

In this thesis document, I have tried to inform and be informed by critical feminist theory and PM/PS in order to understand the issue of helpful responding where there is domestic violence. I have not tried to reconcile the tensions between the two core theoretical positions because critical theorists and PM/PS theorists have different things to say, even while they say some similar things about power and discourse.¹²²

However, there is enough of a difference between them to create a useful tension and rather than seeing the tension as a burden, I have tried to value a holding of the tension, using it as a point of departure for new theorising and practice. As Flax (1990; 1992) has noted in her discussion on postmodern feminism, any understandings about the social world are likely to lie in the cracks and on the margins between shifting certainties. Similarly, as writers such as Pavlich and Ratner (1996) and Napier (2000) have noted, any useful actions are likely to be open-ended processes rather than end points or products.

¹²² I am sympathetic to Lather (cited in B. Fawcett & Featherstone, 1998) who has questioned the value of introducing another set of binaries in order to resolve the difficulties and tensions presented by PM/PS theorising. I had spent many hours trying to work out how to resolve the tension between a radically inspired feminism and PM/PS when it dawned on me that trying to do that reflected how much I was trapped within a modernist frame that begged neatness, a label and certainty from me. Singer (1992), aware of this tendency, has referred to this as a 'libidinal formation' linked to 'a Cartesian impulse toward systematic consolidation' (p. 466).

The Power and Control Wheel



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