Inverting Assumptions: Domestic Abuse Without ‘Male Power’?

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Abstract

Inverting Assumptions: Domestic Abuse Without ‘Male Power’? A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of PhD, by Stephanie Alger, 2016.

Over the last two decades male victims of domestic abuse have received much media and political attention. A polarised debate emerged. At one pole there are those campaigning for the rights of ‘battered’ men to be acknowledged, believing gender to be irrelevant in the aetiology of domestic abuse. At the other pole there are feminists, maintaining that gender is relevant, as domestic abuse is an expression of patriarchy and therefore overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women.

Through a consideration of both male victims’ and female perpetrators’ accounts this research considers the relevance of gender and power, in abusive relationships, where it is the man who is the victim. With a view to establishing whether there is domestic violence without ‘male power’, the thesis asks: In what ways are abused men’s and female perpetrators’ accounts shaped by gender? And what is the relationship between masculinity/femininity and abuse for abused men and female perpetrators? Adopting the Free Association Narrative Interview method (FANI) I interviewed ten men presenting as victims and ten women presenting as perpetrators, accessed via support services and probation referral centres. Both psycho-discursive and psychosocial analysis was carried out on the interview data.

Psycho-discursive analysis revealed how the men re-configured what would otherwise be emasculating disclosures of victimisation, as self-sacrificing heroism. The women’s accounts were constrained by the limited ways that women’s aggression is spoken about. Placing their perpetration firmly within the context of their own victimisation, they ‘struggled’ to recount their experiences in ways that did not contravene expectations of womanhood. Psychosocial analysis allowed for the exploration of individuals’ defences, revealing closely guarded fears, anxieties, insecurities, motivations, and desires. Underscoring men’s accounts of self-sacrifice and heroism and women’s constrained accounts of aggression were guarded vulnerabilities. However, such complexity was lost in the gender specific ways that male victims and female perpetrators positioned themselves within the ‘story’ of domestic abuse. Ultimately, the patterned configurations of power illuminated cannot adequately be explained by the concept of patriarchy, but instead the multiple ways that gender is intersected with other structural hierarchies, as well as individual biography, to create context specific configurations of power.

It is argued that that policymakers, service providers, academics and academic commentators alike must transcend the polarised debate. Only through an understanding no longer founded on oversimplifications, can we embrace the complexity of abusive relationships and in turn establish support that appropriately meets the needs of the male victims and the female perpetrators. This does not mean abandoning analyses of the role of gender and power in domestic abuse, but recognising the complex ways in which they present themselves in both the enactment of violence and in its telling in the aftermath of conflict.
Declaration

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the last two decades, stories about men ‘battered’ by their wives have become a standard filler item in many of the national tabloids. As reported in the Daily Mail, ‘Four in ten domestic violence victims are men’ (Daily Mail, 2010). Alongside such statistical claims there is usually a case study of a man ‘broken’ by domestic violence, with headlines such as, ‘A male victim of domestic violence explains why he was living in fear of his wife’ (Daily Mirror, 2010). He is embarrassed, alone, and disbelieved, while his partner’s violence remains both undetected and untreated. Those campaigning for men’s victimisation to be recognised as nearly equivalent to women’s, are often the source of stories (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind). Even though such reporting typically utilises only the headline figures from national crime surveys and fails to explain the full picture, officials have been put on the defensive. With sex discrimination against men something government felt it must be seen to be redressing, both the Home Office and the Welsh Assembly invested in services for male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse (Home Office, 2012; Welsh Assembly, 2005). Male victim helplines, refuges for men and cognitive behavioural group work programmes for female perpetrators have been established. Meanwhile, women’s services were told both ‘officially and unofficially’ to extend their services to men, or risk losing grants (Violence Against Women in Wales Action Group, 2012: 8; Cockcroft, 2009, Telegraph) (see Chapter 2, for further exploration of service need for male victims).

In the UK, at least, a complex statistical picture regarding men’s victimisation is conveyed in the reports commissioned by government. If we look at the survey returns for 2010 we can see that the experience of domestic abuse victimisation was more subtly gendered than the popular press conveyed at that time. The report titled Crime in England and Wales 2009/10 (Flatley et al, 2010), for example, contains a face-to-face survey of over forty five thousand residents in
households in England and Wales - then known as the British Crime Survey (BCS) (known since April 2012 as the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). The report showed that, of the adults aged between 16-59 who had responded to the BCS 2009/10, 3.1% of men, compared with 5.8% of women, had experienced ‘any partner abuse’ (non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking) in the last year. Life time prevalence figures reveal a similar disparity with 12.7% of men and 26% of women having ever experienced any form of domestic abuse since the age of sixteen. The severer nature of some women’s victimisation is evident from the breakdown of violence types. Nearly ten times as many women as men (9.8% and 1% respectively) have experienced ‘threats’ and more than twice as many women as men (11.7% and 5% respectively) have experienced ‘severe force’ since the age of sixteen. Furthermore, in terms of sexual assaults (including attempts), 0.3% of men, compared with 5.1% of women, had experienced ‘serious sexual assault’ and 0.3% of men, compared with 4.7% of women, had reported being raped since the age of 16. Of the homicide victims between 2009 and 2010, 21 men and 95 women, were killed by a partner, or ex/partner in England and Wales (Smith et al, 2011). This gender asymmetry is reflected in criminal justice processes too. Between 2009 and 2010, the Crown Prosecution Service reported that of the prosecutions for domestic abuse in the English and Welsh courts, 93.1% were male defendants, with female defendants accounting for just 6.9% of the cases (CPS, 2010).

More recent survey and criminal justice statistics suggest little change in this pattern, with women continuing to experience more frequent and life threatening victimisation. The CSEW 2013/14 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2015) found that for any non-sexual partner abuse in the last year, twice as many women (5.9%) than men (2.8%) had experienced victimisation. Again, the more enduring, intimidating and physical nature of women’s victimisation is apparent in the findings of the CSEW 2013/14. This reports that 3.3% of men, compared with 15.1% of women, had experienced threats in their lifetimes. Similarly, 6.7% of men, compared with 16.3% of women, had experienced force since the age of sixteen. In terms of any sexual assaults (including attempts), more than twelve times the number of women as men (6.1% and 0.5% respectively) had ever
experienced ‘serious sexual assault’ and nearly eighteen times the number of 
women as men (5.5% and 0.3% respectively) reported being raped since the age 
of 16 (ONS, 2015). Of the homicide victims aged sixteen years and over killed by a 
partner/ex-partner in 2012/13, 76 women and 15 men were killed in the UK (ONS, 
2014).

Governments in Scotland and England and Wales have nevertheless differed in 
terms of whether to regard the gendered nature of domestic abuse as a definitive 
aspect of the problem. Despite having framed much of its policy in terms of ending 
vio

ence against women and girls (Home Office, 2010), in March 2013 the Home 
Office implemented a gender- neutral definition of domestic violence:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 
threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 
or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family 
members regardless of sexuality (Home Office, 2012).

Whilst the Home Office remains committed to ending the various types of violence 
predominantly experienced by women and girls, including ‘honour’ based violence, 
forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM), it makes it ‘clear that victims 
are not confined to one gender’ (Home Office, 2012: 19).

The Scottish government, by contrast, presumes that:

Domestic abuse is associated with broader gender inequality and 
should be understood in its historical context, whereby societies 
have given greater status, wealth, influence, control and power to 
men (Scottish Executive, 2000: 5).

In line with this understanding Scotland is the only country in the United Kingdom 
to adopt a gender-based definition of domestic abuse, as follows:

Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by 
partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault 
and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse 
(acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated
against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends (Scottish Executive, 2000: 5).

This unique step to adopt a gender-based definition of domestic violence has inspired change (Lombard & Whiting, 2015), evidenced by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon’s pledge in March 2015 to spend £20 million pounds to tackle violence against women (The Scotsman, 2015). Furthermore, by adopting the term ‘abuse’ in the 2000 definition, the Scottish government recognise the range of behaviours that can be used by perpetrators to control their partners, whether emotionally, psychologically, or financially. Despite the Home Office having adopted a gender-neutral definition of the problem, they have tried to define the behaviour in ways that reflects what many female survivors have said about the pervasive nature of intimate terrorism. Recognising the many tactics that abusers can adopt, the Home Office launched a consultation titled ‘Strengthening the Law on Domestic Abuse’ (Home Office, 2014). Subsequently the 2015 Serious Crime Act made coercive and controlling behaviour a specific offence, with coercive behaviour defined as:

An act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim (Home Office, 2012: 19).

And controlling behaviour is defined as:

A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour (Home Office, 2012: 19).

By making coercive and controlling behaviour an offence in England and Wales (Serious Crime Act, 2015), the government has recognised Evan Stark’s work that highlights the pattern of isolating, and degrading tactics as:
A strategic course of self-interested behaviour designed to secure and expand gender-based privilege by establishing a regime of domination in personal life (Stark, 2007, 2013: 21).

The Home Office may have wished to neutralise opposition from those seeking greater support for men, by defining domestic abuse in gender neutral terms. However, the Centre for Social Justice (founded by Conservative Minister Iain Duncan Smith), along with men’s rights campaigners (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind), remain resolute that domestic violence tends to effect men and women equally. They continue to maintain that, ‘little attention is paid to the needs and voices…of…male victims’, as their experiences do not ‘fit’ the ‘power, control and patriarchy model’ (Farmer & Callan, 2012: 14).

This thesis will appraise the evidence that there is gender symmetry in terms of male and female victimisation and perpetration of abuse. Accepting that some men are victims of domestic abuse, I consider their experience. How is gender relevant in terms of men’s experiences of victimisation and women’s experiences of perpetration? How is power implicated in relationships where it is the woman who is the abuser and the man is the victim? I explore these questions through an interview based study with men presenting as victims and women presenting as perpetrators of domestic abuse. Whilst other researchers have carried out interpretive analysis on the accounts of male victims of domestic abuse (Gadd et al, 2002), there is no research that adopts a similarly interpretive approach to analysing the accounts of women presenting as perpetrators of domestic abuse. Furthermore, the strength and uniqueness of this research is its dual analysis approach, in that both psycho-discursive and psychosocial analysis of the data is carried out. Whilst the interpretative methodology adopted here means the findings cannot ‘speak’ for everyone with certainty, what is revealed is the complexity of individual’s relationship with abuse. Specifically, I consider how individual accounts of abuse are not only shaped by the dominant ways that society speaks of it, but also by individuals’ unique biographical experiences.

I start Chapter 2 by providing a theoretical framework that conceptualises the relevance of power and gender to understanding abusive relationships: a
A framework that utilises Connell’s concept of ‘gender order’, which enables us to imagine a more nuanced construction of gender identity and the hierarchical differences that exist amongst men and women (Connell, 1987, 2005). Then drawing on the contemporary work of Jody Miller (2008) and Catherine Donovan, Rebecca Barnes and Catherine Nixon (2014), I consider the complex way that power can be implicated in abusive relationships. Specifically, I explore how gender can intersect with other social inequalities such as class, age, race and education as well as less ‘obvious’ power dynamics like sexual experience, or the networks of support that Donovan and her colleagues (2014) termed ‘social and cultural ‘capital’ (2014: 26).

Having recognised the relevance of gender to any study of domestic abuse, the chapter turns to address the gender symmetry/asymmetry debate surrounding domestic abuse, specifically the claims made by groups campaigning for men’s rights (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind) to the effect that: the rates of victimisation for men and women are similar; that men and women are hurt similarly by domestic abuse; that male victimisation is more hidden than female victimisation; and that there are not enough support services for men experiencing abuse. Each of these claims is posed as a hypothesis and tested against the empirical evidence, presented in both the academic literature and practitioner accounts. I start by outlining the work of family theorists Straus (1979, 2010) and Straus and Gelles (1986) who view gender as irrelevant in the aetiology of domestic abuse. I then present the research that has challenged their gender symmetric understanding and has illuminated how men’s and women’s experiences of abuse are different, most notably the work of Johnson (1995, 2005, 2006, 2008); Johnson and Kelly (2008); Gadd et al (2002); Hester, (2009); Barter and McCarr (2009); Stark (2013) and Donovan and Hester (2014). The chapter then turns its attention to exploring women’s involvement in crime and women’s perpetration of domestic abuse. I consider the claim that equality for women has resulted in a convergence in men’s and women’s rates of violence (Adler & Adler, 1975); a claim that is repeatedly made in 21st century media representations of women’s participation in unruly and delinquent behaviour (Jewkes, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Ringrose, 2006; Young, 2009) despite considerable
academic evidence disproving it (Carlen, 1988; Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Worrall, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Brown, 1986; Heimer et al, 2009; Sharpe, 2009). The chapter concludes by arguing that an interpretively driven analysis allows for a more complex understanding of how gender and power are implicated in abusive relationships, illuminating power as patterning by gender, but not absolute, and infinitely varied in its manifestations and experience. Thus the polarised symmetry/asymmetry debate is transcended, without abandoning an understanding of the significant role gender plays in the aetiology of violence.

In Chapter 3 I present the methodological and ethical issues relevant to this research. I outline who the interview population were and where they were accessed. I then describe the interview process, the measures put in place to ensure that the participants' consent was informed, together with the ethical parameters within which confidentiality was offered and the safeguards put in place to minimise causing emotional harm to participants. The chapter also explains the practices adopted to ensure data security. Furthermore, an overview is provided of the two methods of analysis used - psycho-discursive (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1997, 1999) (see Chapters 4 and 6) and psychosocial (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) (see Chapters 5 and 7). I conclude the chapter by outlining how I learnt to apply the the principles of the Free Association Narrative Interview Method (FANI) (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), reflecting on the difficulties I had remaining responsive to some participants’ accounts. I do this to evidence the reflexive learning that undertaking this PhD entailed.

Chapter 4 attempts to transcend the debate about gender symmetry in domestic abuse. The psycho-discursive analysis of ten male victims of domestic abuse is presented. Two questions are addressed: Firstly, what is the relationship between masculinity and abuse for abused men? And secondly, in what ways are abused men’s accounts shaped by gender? I start this chapter by exploring recent developments in the theorisation of masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1993, 2012, 2013). The psycho-discursive research of Wetherell and Edley (1997, 1999) is also presented. I then show how the ten male victims who I interviewed bought back into heroic ‘masculine ideals’, reconfiguring what
would otherwise be emasculating disclosures of victimisation. Their ‘self-sacrificing heroism’ was typically conveyed through one, or more, of five discursive positions: Endurance; Chivalry; Managing ‘crazy’ women; Physical and accountable/dangerous men; The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering. To conclude, I acknowledge the experiential relevance of gender for the men I spoke to, linking my findings to the work of other researchers who similarly deconstruct the relevance of gender amidst a general but not absolute pattern of sexual difference (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009). I end the chapter with the observation that whilst the gender order is persisting and pervasive, a more complex understanding of gender power dynamics than that offered by early feminist analysis of patriarchy is needed. Gender is relevant in terms of the way that men are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. Hidden behind attempts to buy back into heroic ‘masculine ideals’, are struggles to reconcile what it means to be a man, with the feelings of hurt, disappointment and unfulfilled expectations and their pain stemming from childhood experiences of abuse.

Chapter 5 provides a psychosocial understanding of three male victims - Jim, Ean and Gary - exploring how their fears, anxieties, insecurities and desires influenced what they said, or avoided saying. I start the chapter by briefly outlining the work of Jefferson (1996, 1997a,b., 2002, 2008) Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Gadd (2000, 2012) alone and with others (Gadd et al, 2003, 2007, 2014, 2015). With the work of these criminological pioneers of the psychosocial interpretive methodology in mind, I explore the ‘inner worlds’ of Jim, Ean and Gary and their connection to the masculine discourses they used to position themselves. In turn, I provide a ‘pen portrait’ of their individual stories, followed by an analysis of their accounts. My interpretatively driven analysis illuminates how the relationship between masculinity and abuse for abused men is a complex one marked by unresolved ‘pain’, complexly woven between the uniquely biographical experience of failed relationships and the more general social experience of inhabiting a gendered order patterned by patriarchal expectations that are no longer so realisable. Ultimately the men’s often contradictory accounts exposed guarded struggles to avoid pain and negotiate intimacy amidst class and culturally tinged expectations of how real men should behave.
Chapter 6 explores the limited discursive options open to female perpetrators. This chapter presents the psycho-discursive analysis of ten female perpetrators of domestic abuse. Two questions are addressed: Firstly, what is the relationship between femininity and abuse for the female perpetrator? And secondly, in what ways are female perpetrators’ accounts shaped by gender? I start the chapter by recapping some of the main issues surrounding women's involvement in crime and more specifically women’s perpetration of domestic abuse. I then illustrate how the ten female perpetrators who I interviewed negotiated their femininity alongside their experiences of victimisation and their own perpetration, by adopting one or more of three discursive positions: Victimised and damaged, Resilient and protective, or Vengeful and seeking reprisal. I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the experiential relevance of gender for the women I spoke to (Gadd et al., 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013), but also most notably its relevance in terms of the way that women are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. I show how the social unacceptability of female aggression left the women with limited explanatory frameworks. Hence, the discursive positions of the women I interviewed reflect the combination of a limited range of options with regard to how they can depict their violence, constrained understandings of their pain resulting from ‘chronic’, ‘multi-faceted’ ‘oppression’ (Stark, 2013: 19), and their attempts to avoid shame and stigma in the contexts of domesticity, motherhood and failed and damaging intimate relationships.

In Chapter 7, I offer a psychosocial understanding of three female perpetrators: Jane, Marie and Alina. As in Chapter 5, I draw on the work of Jefferson, Hollway and Gadd (Jefferson, 1996, 1997a.b., 2002, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Gadd, 2000, 2012; Gadd et al, 2003, 2007, 2014, 2015) to explore the women’s ‘inner worlds’. This process reveals that the incoherence and contradiction present in female perpetrators’ accounts (as was the case with the male victim’s accounts in Chapter 4) should not be viewed as necessarily evidencing deceit – as men’s rights groups tend to construe it - but instead as attempts to guard against painful feelings and behaviour rendered shameful in the context of ideals of femininity: for Jane the painful reality of the life she had lived - that her life had not been the ‘lovely’ experience of domesticity that she had imagined; for Marie the idea that
not ‘everyone’ is deserving of a second chance - that her family and partnership may not be ones that should stay together; and for Alina the reality that her anger at her ex-partner was in part rooted in her experience of racist victimisation by her parents- that instead of marrying the man she loved, her life had been one of abuse by a man her parents had forced on her.

In Chapter 8, following a summation of each chapter, I return to considering two overriding questions: Firstly, what does this research tell us about the relevance of gender in relationships where it is the man who is the victim? In answering this question the differential experiences, impact and fear experienced by men and women is highlighted, as well as their gendered perspectives on loss. Secondly, is there domestic violence without ‘male power’? The chapter ends by considering the implications of my findings for policymakers, service providers, and academics alike.
Chapter 2

Literature review

This chapter starts by providing a theoretical framework that conceptualises the relevance of gender and power to understanding abusive relationships. Specifically, I outline a framework that utilises Connell’s theorisation of a ‘gender order’, which enables us to imagine a more nuanced construction of gender identity and the hierarchical differences that exist amongst men and women (Connell, 1987: 119). I draw on recent research that recognises the complex way that power can be implicated in abusive relationships. First, I describe the work of Jody Miller (2008), whose study of African American young people in disadvantaged St. Louis neighbourhoods illuminates how gender can intersect with other social inequalities such as class and race to affect the power play within relationships. Second, I outline the work of Catherine Donovan, Rebecca Barnes and Catherine Nixon (2014) whose study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) relationships recognises both the social markers that can intersect with gender (such as class, age, education and race) and the less obvious power dynamics they term ‘social, or cultural ‘capital’’ (such as sexual experience, or a good peer network) (Donovan et al, 2014: 26).

Having recognised the relevance of gender to any study of domestic abuse, I then provide an intervention into the gender symmetry/asymmetry debate, addressing specifically the claims made by groups campaigning for men’s rights (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind), typically to the effect that the rates of victimisation for men and women are similar; that men and women are hurt similarly by domestic abuse; that male victimisation is more hidden than female victimisation; and that there are not enough support services for men experiencing abuse. Each of these claims is posed as a hypothesis and tested against the empirical evidence presented in both the academic literature and practitioner accounts. I start by outlining the work of family theorists Straus (1979, 2010) and Straus and Gelles (1986) whose work has been heavily criticised for failing to recognise the gendered nature of domestic
Research is presented that has challenged the gender symmetric understanding of domestic abuse and has illuminated how men’s and women’s experience of abuse differ, most notably the work of Johnson (1995, 2005, 2006, 2008); Johnson and Kelly (2008); Gadd et al (2002); Hester (2009); Barter and McCarr (2009); Stark, (2013) and Donovan and Hester (2014). This chapter then turns its attention to exploring women’s involvement in crime and women’s perpetration of domestic abuse. I consider the theory that equality for women has resulted in a convergence in men’s and women’s rates of violence (Adler & Adler, 1975), an idea that is challenged by the finding that women who do commit crime are amongst the most marginalised members of society (Carlen, 1988), as well as evidence suggesting that the increasing arrests for women have more to do with becoming ‘visible’ than changes in behaviour (Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Worrall, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Brown, 1986; Heimer et al, 2009; Sharpe, 2009). The chapter concludes that only an interpretively driven gender-sensitive analysis of both male victim and female perpetrator accounts can illuminate the impact of social, cultural and biographical experience on an individual’s relationship with abuse.

The relevance of gender and power to understanding abusive relationships

It is with a nuanced understanding of gender as the central organizational feature of society that I carried out this research; an understanding that does not view gender simply as the physical differences between men and women, but instead as a social construction that prescribes gendered behaviours, responsibilities and expectations that inform men and women how they are meant to be:

Gender arrangements are reproduced socially (not biologically) by the power of the structures to shape individual action… Gender like other social structures, is multi-dimensional; it is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but all of these things at once (Connell, 2009: 11).
For the 1970s feminists (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979) it was the patriarchal structure of society that ensured that men benefit from the subjugation of women. It was this gendered hierarchy that some argued both explained and condoned men’s violence towards women. For Dobash and Dobash:

Men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in western society—aggression, male dominance and female subordination—and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance’ (1979: 24)

For them domestic abuse remains a gendered problem as ‘spousal violence is to all extents and purposes wife beating’ (Dobash & Dobash, 1978: 439). However, explaining violence towards women as symptomatic of the gendered social order has been described ‘as problematic as it has been promising’ (Hunnicutt, 2009: 554). Hunnicutt (2009: 554) points to seven criticisms that have been levied at the concept of patriarchy:

1. The term implies a ‘false universalism’.
2. It is ‘reductionist’ as it assumes all men represent a unitary group.
3. It does not explain why all men living in patriarchal societies are not violent.
4. It does not account for violence within same-sex relationships.
5. It simplifies understandings of power hierarchies and relations.
6. It is ‘essentialist’ in its assumptions about gender relations and social structures.
7. It does not account for women’s violence against men.

Thus a simple understanding of patriarchy is inadequate for the purposes of my study, as it leaves us unable to envisage how men can be victims and women can perpetrators of domestic abuse. This is where Connell’s model of ‘multiple masculinities’ (Connell, 1987: 175) and ‘power relations’ (Connell, 1987: 5) is of
critical importance. Without losing sight of the structure of gender relations, Connell provides a more nuanced understanding of the construction of gender identity, one that allows hierarchical differences amongst men and women to be acknowledged. For Connell institutional, or organisational gender regimes can interact, or conflict producing a ‘gender order’ (Connell, 1987: 119). As the ‘gender order’ is produced, maintained, or contested, both ideologically and institutionally, it is therefore changeable over time through behaviour and practice (Connell, 1987: 119). Of Connell’s ‘multiple masculinities’ (Connell, 1987: 178), ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is the dominant masculinity, embodying stereotypical masculine traits of power, dominance, strength and authority (Connell, 1987: 58). Although they might aspire to it, most men fall short of this hegemonic ‘ideal’, despite being ‘complicit’ with and still benefiting from the gendered hierarchy that ensures the subordination of women (Connell, 1995: 79). For Connell power is definitive of hegemonic masculinity and violence is symbolic of that power (Connell, 1987: 39).

Whilst for some (Messerchmidt, 1993) violence is viewed simply as a means of accomplishing masculinity, I, like Gadd (2002) would criticise an understanding that violence is an act constitutive of masculinity. At the same time as recognising that most violence is perpetrated by men, it is important to acknowledge that not all men are violent (Connell, 2000: 215). Therefore by embracing an understanding that does not accept that violence is an intrinsic part of being masculine, one is able to focus on individuals and the multiple relations of hierarchy that they operate within, for example, ethnicity, age, class and sexuality. Conceived thus, women as well as men may occupy multiple positions of inequality, or privilege within the social hierarchy as ‘an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor or oppressed’ (Hill Collins, 1991: 225). Some women may operate to maintain patriarchal structures and ideologies, as they benefit from an alternative privileged position in terms of for example, age, or education (Dinnerstein, 1976). Armed with this understanding we are able to see why it is that not all men are violent, and why despite living in a culture in which the defining feature of the most esteemed masculine identity is power, there is not a biological inevitability that being a man determines that you are violent.
Two notable pieces of research that illuminate the complex way that gender and other intersecting power dynamics can be implicated in abusive relationships have been conducted by Miller (2008) and by Donovan, Barnes and Nixon (2014). Miller carried out in-depth interviews and surveys with 75 African American young women (35) and young men (40) in disadvantaged St. Louis neighbourhoods. Whilst her work revealed men to be the beneficiaries of the ‘gender-based power inequalities’ that existed within the gangs they were members of, it also revealed the complexity of those power dynamics (Miller, 2008: 177). Miller illuminates the chivalrous protection/powerlessness paradox that existed within the gangs that she studied, with gender being both a risk factor for and protection against victimisation. Whilst girls were sexually exploited by men within the gangs, conversely they were also shielded from some dangerous gang violence. Paradoxically being a protected female conferred gang status and worth (Miller, 2008). Whilst Miller’s (2008) focus was the more commonly considered intersections of inequality i.e. gender, economic and racial disadvantage, Catherine Donovan, Rebecca Barnes and Catherine Nixon (2014) warn against making ‘assumptions’ based on ‘obvious’ understandings of how social power might operate in intimate relationships’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 25). These researchers explored abusive behaviours in lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) and/or transgender (T) relationships. They found that in LGB and/or T relationships more nuanced experiential forms of power operated, which ‘might subvert more readily identifiable social structural markers of power’ such ‘as ethnicity, age and income’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 26). Specifically that a partner with more LGB and/or T sexual, or social experience and/or more peer connections had what the researchers termed more ‘social, or cultural ‘capital’’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 26). It was this ‘social, or cultural ‘capital’’ that challenged ‘obvious’ understanding of how power might operate within abusive relationships (Donovan et al, 2014: 26). The researchers therefore warned against over relying on simple assumptions regarding the primary power dynamics operating within such relationships (Donovan et al, 2014: 26).

It is with a similarly intersectional understanding as Miller (2008) and Donovan et al (2014) of how gender/power are implicated in intimate relationships, that I
explore the experiences of male victims and female perpetrators of abuse. Whilst I accept that any theorisation of violence that ignores the relevance of gender risks ‘impoverishing analysis’ (Stanko, 2006: 551) and ‘presents a barrier to eliminating, or reducing domestic abuse in our society’ (McFeely et al, 2013: 2), in line with Connell (1990), I do not conceive the gendered hierarchy to be a fixed and timeless top down structure that obscures differences. Instead, I see it as a fluid organisation that is intersected with other forms of hierarchy, or ‘terrains of power’ (Flax, 1993). It is also critical to accept, as Kelly does, ‘the variability with which gendered selves and individual biography combine’ (Kelly, 1996: 36-37). Armed with this insight my research reveals not only the structural inequalities faced by women, but how other differences such as class, race, education, sexuality as well as less ‘obvious’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 25) markers of social, or structural power such as being party to a partner’s personal information or secrets, or knowing the paternity of your child. Importantly, I also reveal the mutual shaping that exists between such differences and individuals unique experiences. Hence, the truly complex way that gender and power are implicated in abusive relationships regardless of sex, or sexuality is revealed.

In what follows I offer an intervention into the gender symmetry/asymmetry debate surrounding domestic abuse, testing the claims made by groups campaigning for men’s rights (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind) against the empirical evidence, presented in both the academic literature (Straus, 1979, 2010; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Gadd et al, 2002, 2003; Hester, 2009; Stanko, 2006; Stark, 2007, 2013; Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Hester, 2009; Barter & McCarry, 2009; Donovan & Hester, 2014) and practitioner accounts (Panteloudakisi (Respect), 2010; Women’s Aid, 2015). Before concluding the chapter, I explore women’s involvement in crime and women’s perpetration of domestic abuse.

**Are the rates of victimisation for men and women similar?**

Whilst research overwhelmingly shows gender to be the most significant risk factor for domestic abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008;
Stark, 2007), the significance of gender is disputed by those who advocate the notion that women are as likely as men to be violent in the home, believing that violence is a human issue and gender is not relevant (Straus, 1979, 2010; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Family violence theorists maintain that domestic abuse is just one of many types of abuse that occur within families and one that is perpetrated by both men and women at equal rates (McNeely et al, 2001), or at higher rates by women (Straus & Gelles, 1986). These theorists base their symmetry argument on large scale community surveys in which they have obtained evidence using The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979; Straus et al, 1996, 2003). The CTS was developed by Gelles and Straus in 1979 and is the most widely used instrument to measure abuse and violence between partners/ex partners (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Frieze, 2005).

Whilst the CTS has been shown to have some reliability (Archer, 1999), it has been heavily criticised (Gadd et al, 2002, 2003; Hester, 2009; Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Stanko, 2006; Stark, 2007). Family theorists fail to consider the context and motivations of violence (Gadd et al, 2003; Hester, 2009). Its ‘act-based’ approach (Dobash & Dobash, 2004: 329) does not consider the intention behind assaults. Therefore, a defensive ‘hit’ whilst trying to fend off a partner’s unprovoked and sustained attack, will simply still be recorded as an individual having ‘hit’ their partner/ex-partner. Another issue is with the CTS scoring. Participants only have to indicate that they have committed a single ‘act’ to be defined as ‘violent’, thus individuals who have committed many significant acts of violence are equated with individuals who have ‘tried to hit a partner’ (Dobash & Dobash, 2004: 329). A further criticism is that the outcome of an act is not discernible from the act itself. For example, one version of the CTS asks participants have you ever ‘thrown an object at your partner’? However, as pointed out by Dobash & Dobash (2004: 329), throwing a pillow at your partner is not the same as throwing a lamp at them, thus highlighting that ‘the exact nature and consequences of any ‘act’ cannot be assessed solely through the knowledge that it occurred’ (Dobash & Dobash, 2004: 329). To address the criticism that the consequences of abuse are not considered, Straus developed a revised CTS
instrument, the CTS2, which does take into account injuries resulting from conflict (Straus et al, 1996).

Despite the revision, the large scale community surveys still provide a limited understanding of domestic conflict. If we are to fully understand abusive relationships it is imperative that the context, motivations and meanings behind the abuse are considered (Gadd et al, 2003; Hester, 2009). This is where the works of Johnson (1995, 2005, 2006, 2008) and Kelly and Johnson (2008) are particularly useful. Their theory developed through research that utilised both incident based measures and detailed descriptions of abuse, is helpful when considering evidence offered to support gender symmetry in the perpetration and victimisation of domestic (Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008). Johnson (2006), in his article A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence and Kelly and Johnson (2008) in their article Differentiation among types of intimate partner violence, attempt to bring clarity to the gender symmetry debate. They argue that the competing claims of the family violence and feminist research can be explained in terms of different methodological approaches to collecting data and therefore the different population survey sampling captures (Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Kelly and Johnson (2008) identified five different forms of partner violence (1) ‘Situational’ violence, or ‘common couple violence’; (2) ‘Intimate terrorism’ (Johnson, 2006); (3) ‘Violent resistance’; (4) ‘Separation instigated related violence’; (5) ‘Mutual violent control’.

‘Situational’ violence, or ‘common couple violence’ (CCV) is intermittently perpetrated by one or both partners as a means to gain control in a specific conflict (Rosen et al, 2005). However, this control is considered situational and does not occur generally over the duration of a relationship, only when a crisis or break up occurs (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Disagreements that do culminate in physical aggression can give way to mutual fighting whereby both partners can inflict relatively minor assaults against each other. Initiation of CCV is equal between genders. Kelly and Johnson (2008) argue that CCV is captured well by
the CTS, as those involved in this type of conflict are the subsample of the population most willing to participate in self-report surveys.

‘Intimate terrorism’ (IT) involves a general pattern of control, which is the primary motivator for IT and central to this type of violence. Violence is merely one tactic of IT (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000) with emotional abuse also featuring strongly (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Rosen et al, 2005). The incident rates of conflict are higher than for CCV and more likely to escalate to severe violence. The perpetrators of IT are mostly men. IT is picked up by analysis of police records and to a lesser degree by victim surveys.

‘Violent resistance’ (VR) is effectively violence deployed by victims resisting violently (Johnson & Ferraro, 2002). VR is mostly used by women who retaliate against an abusive partner’s attempts to control (Rosen et al, 2005). Whilst violence can be perpetrated in self-defence against an imminent threat, it can also be retaliatory and retributive in nature when there is an expectation of further victimisation.

‘Separation instigated related violence’ (SIRV) arises out of the conflicts that occur when partners are trying to leave each other. This violence is short lived and there is usually no prior history of abuse within the relationship.

‘Mutual violent control’ (MVC) involves mutually controlling partners who use both violent and nonviolent acts to gain control (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). There are frequent arguments relating to unresolved conflict with apportioning blame and mistrust central to the disputes.

Johnson has argued that the discrepancy between feminist and family violence research are mostly due to approaches to sampling that capture two theoretically different kinds of violence. He argues that whilst common couple violence is captured by self-report surveys, intimate terrorism is typically found in agency samples (Johnson, 1995). Johnson’s typology (1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) supports the argument that it is women who are more frequently terrorised and grievously harmed by their partners/ex partners than men (ONS, 2014, 2015; Roe, 2009).
The need for contextual insight is supported by other research that has looked closely at men's abusive experiences finding, as suggested by Kelly and Johnson (2008), that men who report being victimised by their partners have often experienced situational couple violence, or violent resistance from their partners. One evaluation of a project developed specifically for male victims of domestic abuse found situational couple, or violent resistance to be their experience. The Dyn Project, an organisation set up in 2005 to provide support for male victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales, collected twelve months of data on the men who they supported. Drawing on their findings - from 171 men’s case files; ten narrative accounts; a ‘small group’ of follow up interviews; informant interviews with representatives from key agencies; and the project coordinator’s observations - the project established that of the men engaging with their service, 46% were men known to the agencies who share information regarding risk, via the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MAAC), as having a history of abusing women (Robinson & Rowlands, 2006).

Likewise, in a follow-up study to the Scottish Crime Survey (SCS), Gadd et al (2002) cautioned future researchers that they ‘should pay particular attention to ensuring respondents fully understand the nature of the experiences they are being asked to disclose’ (Gadd et al, 2002: 2). The Scottish Crime Survey (2000) had found that 6 % of women and 3 % of men had reported being victims of domestic abuse, a percentage of men far higher than the numbers seeking help from police, or support services. However when Gadd and colleagues (2002) retraced and re-interviewed the SCS participants, they found evidence of misinterpretation of what they were being asked in the original survey. Some men thought that they were being asked about not domestic assaults, but vandalism or property crime, while some men admitted on re-interview to being the main perpetrators, rather than victims of domestic abuse:

Only a minority of those referred to as ‘victims’ within published reports about the Scottish Crime Survey actually perceived themselves as victims. This remained the case even when the responses of those men who misinterpreted the remit of the self-
complete questionnaire were omitted from the calculation. (Gadd et al, 2002: 2)

As a result of the information provided by the men, the ‘victim’ status of thirteen of them could easily be redefined as ‘retaliator’, ‘equal combatant’, or ‘primary instigator’.

**Are men and women ‘hurt’ similarly by domestic abuse?**

To get a more comprehensive understanding of who is affected by domestic abuse, we must consider prevalence, incidence and impact (Hester, 2009). When considering data, prevalence helps us to see how many people experience certain behaviours, while incidence can provide insight into intensity and possibly severity. Only by also considering impact are we able to understand the effect and consequences of that behaviour (Hester, 2009). So when men are victimised, what do we know about the impact of that abuse? We do know that male victims suffer poorer general health, higher rates of depression and mental illness compared to men who do not suffer domestic abuse (Coker et al 2000; Reid et al, 2008).

Despite the claims of similarities with regard to ‘hurt’ between men and women, research reveals men’s experiences of victimisation to be different. Gadd et al (2003: 10) explain that in their research ‘very few of the men’s account’s lent support to the idea that there are substantial numbers of men living in fear for their own safety. Men often do not report being victimised because the ‘incidents are trivial, non-criminal and/or inconsequential’ (Gadd et al, 2003: 112) and ‘men are less likely to live in fear of violence against them and it does not impact upon their daily lives as it does with female victims (Lombard, 2013: 188). As stated by Dobash and Dobash (2004):

...intimate violence is primarily an asymmetrical problem of men’s violence to women, and women’s violence does not equate to men’s in terms of frequency, severity, consequences and the victim’s sense of safety and well-being (2004: 324).
A study conducted at the University of Bristol also supports the view that women’s experiences of domestic abuse are often different to men’s. Hester (2009) collected data regarding incidents of domestic violence reported to the Northumbria police over a six year period between 2001 and 2007 (Hester, 2009). Rather than focussing on single incidents, the longitudinal nature of Hester’s research allowed for patterns of abuse over time to be revealed. Hester found that the nature of incidents, as well as the levels of repeat perpetration and arrest and conviction could be differentiated by gender (Hester, 2009: 7). Whilst female perpetrators used ‘weapons’ ‘in order to protect themselves’ (Hester, 2009: 19), such actions did not create a context of fear (Hester, 2009: 8). By contrast male perpetrators were significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats, harassment and to damage women’s property; violence that was ‘more severe’ and ‘more likely to involve fear’ and control (Hester, 2009: 19).

Stark’s thesis titled Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life (2007) arguably the strongest re-articulation of the feminist control model, also illuminates the pervasive nature of female victimisation. Stark maintains that the ‘pattern’ of abuse should be the focus for ‘assessment and intervention’ (Stark, 2013: 19), rather than any ‘discrete episode’ as:

Applying the violence model to the typical pattern has fragmented women’s experience of abuse (Stark, 2013: 20).

This approach Stark asserts will reveal the ‘chronic’, ‘multi-faceted nature’ of women’s ‘oppression’ (Stark, 2013: 19). Furthermore, he warns of the ‘tragic consequences of applying the narrow violence model’ (Stark, 2013: 20) which views partner abuse as discrete episodes of assault, the seriousness of which is measurable ‘by applying a calculus of physical or psychological harm’ (Stark, 2013: 19). Stark asserts that such tragedy is apparent in the police response to domestic incidents in England and Wales (Stark, 2013: 20). Drawing on the research of Hester and Westmarland (2006), who followed 692 offenders arrested in Northumbria between 2004-2005, Stark highlights that despite the ratio of arrests to calls being ‘quite high (91%)’, the incidents being ‘taken out of their historical context’ meant that arrests were primarily for the relatively minor offence
of ‘breach of the peace’ (Stark, 2013: 20). This resulted in only 5% of cases leading to conviction, with most perpetrators receiving a fine, and half of the offenders re-arrested multiple times for perpetrating abuse within the three years (2002-2004) covered by the study (Stark, 2013: 20).

In terms of abusive teenage relationships, Barter and McCarr (2009) ‘paint’ a similarly gendered ‘picture’. They carried out a three year research project in eight secondary schools in England, Scotland and Wales involving young people between the ages of 13 and 17. Data was collected using a self-completion survey and face to face semi-structured in-depth interviews with vignettes. In total 1353 survey responses were analysed and 91 interviews were carried out (62 girls and 29 boys). The teenagers were asked if their partners had ever used physical force such as *pushing, slapping, hitting or holding you down*. A quarter of girls compared to 18% of boys reported some form of physical violence, with the girls much more likely than boys to experience repeated patterns of violence. When asked whether they had experienced *more severe* physical force by a partner, for example, ‘punching, strangling, beating you up, hitting you with an object’, 11% of girls compared to 4% of boys reported that they had. Furthermore, the researchers found a statistically significant gender difference in terms of sexual violence, with one in three girls compared to 16% of boys reporting at least one experience of sexual violence from their partner. Whilst the research showed that most often the young people had been pressured into sexual activity, five times as many girls as boys had an experienced of being been pressured into sexual intercourse (Barter and McCarr, 2013: 10).

As well as establishing the frequency and severity of the violence experienced by their teenage cohort, Barter and McCarr (2009), like Hester (2009), also reveal the importance of investigating the impact of that violence. Their findings showed that significantly fewer boys than girls (14% compared to over 75%) reported that physical violence had a negative impact on them (all the girls who reported severe physical violence reported a negative impact). Whilst the young women most commonly reported feeling ‘scared or frightened’ and ‘upset or unhappy’ (Barter & McCarr, 2013: 107), young men spoke less of negative impacts and in some
instances spoke of their female partner’s use of violence as ‘funny’ or having ‘no impact’ (Barter & McCarry, 2013: 107). Specifically in terms of the impact of sexual violence, the research showed that the vast majority (70%) of girls reported the experience having a negative impact on their wellbeing. By contrast, the vast majority of boys (87%) reported sexual violence having no adverse effect on their wellbeing (Barter & McCarry, 2013: 111). The researchers found that whilst a minority of males did discuss ‘their girlfriends’ violence towards them’, it was ‘almost exclusively…in response to their own initial use of violence’ (Barter & McCarry, 2013: 108).

**Is male victimisation more ‘hidden’ than female victimisation?**

It has been asserted by some that the abuse of men often goes unreported and is, therefore, more ‘hidden’ than female victimisation (George & Yarwood, 2004; Watson & Parsons, 2005). It is argued that this is for two main reasons. Firstly, men do not recognise what is happening to them as abuse (Carmichael, 2007), i.e. they do not name the problem correctly. Secondly, men do not seek help for domestic abuse as victimisation results in a ‘gender role conflict’ that challenges their sense of physical and emotional invulnerability as men (Cheung et al, 2009: 447). Despite the suggestion that men are underreporting Gadd et al (2003) found that:

> The infrequency with which male victims appeared in Scottish recorded crime statistics relative to women as mostly due to gender differences in patterns of victimisation and not differential reporting patterns or police recording priorities (Gadd et al, 2003: 99).

Gadd et al (2003) maintained that whilst crime survey data overstated men’s experiences of domestic abuse, the relative absence of male victims of abuse gathered by the Scottish police, could be accounted for in terms of gender differences in experiences of victimisation and reporting patterns. Furthermore, ‘a systematic review of the literature has found that men may actually be over-
reporting instances of being victims of domestic violence’ (Hester, 2009: 4). Hester’s findings show that whilst men and women came to the attention of the police as a result of a domestic incidents, they had very different reasons for not cooperating - women because they were afraid and men because they were in fact perpetrators (Hester, 2009: 19). There is also evidence to suggest that victim support services find themselves having to consider the validity of some individuals’ claims of victimisation. An analysis of calls to the Respect Men’s Advice Line suggests that men who initially identify themselves as victims provide information by the end of the call suggesting that they are not a victim and/or that they are a perpetrator (Panteloudaki, 2010):

Of the 2,903 men who initially appeared to identify themselves as victims of domestic violence [in calls to Respect, 2010/11], the helpline worker...in about half of the cases where the man initially appeared to identify as a victim of domestic violence...agreed, based on the evidence that the man gave in the phone call, that he was a victim...Most of the rest, from the things that they said during the call, did not appear to be victims but were instead either in a non-abusive but happy relationship, or were the perpetrator.

(Respect Toolkit, 2013: 65-66)

Gay men’s victimisation

It has been found that 35.2% of gay men say that they have experienced abuse at some time in a same-sex relationship (Donovan et al, 2006). Whilst it is recognised that many of the ‘physical, sexual, economic’ and ‘emotional’ techniques used to ‘maintain control’ in same-sex relationships are the same as those used within heterosexual ones, there are also those specific to the gay community (Leventhal, 1999: 74). For gay men reporting victimisation can be more difficult, as an additional barrier to admitting to victimisation for some gay men is having their sexuality disclosed (Leventhal, 1999: 74) and the threat of being ‘outed’ (having their sexuality disclosed) can have a huge bearing on gay men’s
decisions to leave an abusive relationship (Renzetti, 1998). For some, as would be the case regardless of sexuality, having HIV/AIDS status disclosed can also deter help seeking (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Respect, 2013). Furthermore, there is a reluctance to seek help to exit an abusive gay relationship stemming from a fear that those they might turn to for help may be homophobic, discriminatory, or lacking in their ability to provide the specialist support required (Robinson & Rowlands, 2006).

Generally the fact that, whatever their sexuality, fewer men report being victimised than women could be a result of a combination of factors: the lesser severity, frequency and consequences of the domestic violence men experience (Archer, 2000, Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Johnson & Bunge, 2001; Kimmel, 2002; Mirrlees–Black, 1999; Richards, 2003; Walby & Allen, 2004; Roe, 2009; Saunders, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a); the fear of incriminating themselves where they have been abusive too (Gadd et al, 2002); and a mixture of shame and embarrassment connected to expectations around masculinity, or the ‘outing’ of their private information (Renzetti, 1998).

**Are there enough support services for men experiencing abuse?**

As mentioned briefly in the Chapter 1, the Home Office and The Welsh Assembly have invested in services for male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse (Home Office, 2012; Welsh Assembly, 2005). Male victim helplines, refuges for men and cognitive behavioural group work programmes for female perpetrators have been set up. Furthermore, women’s services have been told that if they do not extend their services to men they may lose funding (Violence Against Women in Wales Action Group, 2012: 8; Cockcroft, *Telegraph*, 2009). However, recent statistics show that already scarce women’s resources have been put under more pressure, with reports suggesting that of the 6,226 women in need of refuge, there are only 5,386 UK refuge places available, resulting in one in seven women left on a waiting list (Stelmaszek & Fisher, 2013). Similarly Women’s Aid (2015) reported in their 2014 annual survey that over the last financial year, nearly a third (31%) of
women referred to refuges in 2013/14 were turned away because of lack of space. On just one day in 2014, 112 women and their 84 children were turned away from refuge because they could not be accommodated (data provided by 140 refuges). Furthermore, in just one week in 2014, 369 women were turned away from outreach services in the community because of a lack of capacity (data provided by 87 services).

Whilst there has been a 25% growth in community based service provision for men between 2011 and 2013, many male victim services are under-utilised, with some taking less than six referrals a year (Taylor, 2013: 7). The demand on refuge provision paints a similar picture. In 2008 the Home Office Select Affairs Committee concluded that men do not need the same ‘magnitude’ of ‘bed spaces’ as women; a reality confirmed by evidence that the ten units providing refuge for male victims’ country wide are experiencing a lack of demand (Taylor, 2013: 5). None of this is surprising when we consider, as research suggests, victims of domestic violence are more likely to utilise shelter services if they have been injured during the incident of domestic violence and remain in fear for their lives (Brady et al, 2009). It follows, therefore, that the greater demand for emergency shelter would be from the most frequently injured and fearful, who are very predominantly women.

Exploring women’s involvement in crime

Since the 1970s an argument has emerged between those social scientists who maintain that patriarchy fosters violence that is predominantly committed by men and directed towards women (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979, 2004; Radford & Stanko, 1994; Stanko, 2001) and those social scientists who suggesting that there has been a convergence between male and female rates of crime. Freda Adler was one of the first to contribute to this debate. In her controversial book *Sisters in Crime* (1975), Adler acknowledged greater female participation in law breaking throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Adler identified a ‘new breed of female criminal’, engaging in more aggressive and violent behaviour, who, she felt, had become
more ‘masculine’. She linked the change in rate and nature of female crime to greater liberation and equality for women during the period. She argued that women had previously sought status through men by conforming to the patriarchal definition of femininity. This new social freedom meant that whilst some women took advantage of the new ‘power’ legitimately, others embraced the criminal lifestyle that this empowerment had afforded them (Adler & Adler, 1975). Adler asserted:

Women [are] no longer indentured to the kitchen, baby carriages and bedrooms...in the same way that women are demanding equal opportunities in legitimate fields, so a number are determined to force their way into the world of major crimes (1975: 67).

Whilst Adler’s research has been criticised for being methodologically flawed, ‘statistical illusions caused by a smallness of the base’ (Smart, 1979: 53), her concept has endured in 21st century media representations of women’s participation in unruly and delinquent behaviour (Jewkes, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006). ‘Ladette’ (Ringrose, 2006) and ‘shemale’ (Young, 2009) antics are captured in headlines such as ‘Scourge of the ladette thugs: Rising tide of violent crime committed by young women’ (Slack, 2009) and ‘Violent Women: Binger Drinking Culture Fuels Rise in Attacks by Women’ (Clout, 2008), providing evidence of the scrutiny girls’ and young women’s behaviour are under. The problem of violence by females has been internationally acknowledged in research conducted in Scotland (Burman & Batchelor, 2009) the United States (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008) and Australia (Carrington, 2006; Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012: 339-340). This is a concern supported by police arrest figures that show a significant rise in women arrested for violent offences from 37,100 in 1999/2000, to 88,100 in 2007/8 (Hand & Dodd, 2009). However, it is questionable whether this rise in arrests can be attributed to women’s liberation. Much of the research into young women and violence shows that they are ‘severely constrained by both their material circumstances and attendant ideologies of working-class femininity’ (Batchelor, 2009: 407-408). As recognised by Carlen (1988):
The vast majority of women who commit crime have not been ‘liberated’ - either economically or ideologically. On the contrary…women criminals are often among the worst casualties of the gender trap (Carlen, 1988: 10).

First, vast gender equalities in income levels and poverty persist (World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2013). Second, there is ‘little or no association’ between liberated attitudes and self-reported delinquency (Giordano & Cernkovich, 1979: 467). A more plausible explanation for increasing arrests of women is that younger women are now more ‘visible’ in public places (Brown, 1986: 374). As self-report studies show:

There has been no meaningful or systematic change in women’s involvement in crimes of interpersonal violence and in the gender gap in the past couple of decades (Steffensmeier et al, 2005: 93).

Steffensmeier and colleagues assert that policy change is the reason why more women are being arrested:

We have changed our laws, police practices, and policies in…ways towards enhanced identification and criminalisation of violence in general and of women’s violence in particular (2005: 94).

One example of changing practices specifically in the area of domestic abuse is the pro-arrest policy introduced by the Crime and Security Act 2010. Pressure on the police to make an accurate identification of the culpable party in domestic incidents has heightened as a result of the introduction of Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN), or what have been termed ‘go’ orders. Officers of the rank of Superintendent, or above were given the power to exclude an individual from their home, if he/she ‘has reasonable grounds to believe that a person has been violent or has threatened violence towards a person with whom he is associated’ (Crime and Security Act, 2010). Whilst implemented to strengthen the criminal justice approach to violence in the home, pro-arrest policy has resulted in women who have retaliated against a violent male partner being arrested instead
of the primary male perpetrator (Hester, 2009). More generally, it is suggested that the ‘soft policing’ of women’s behaviour has been replaced with ‘criminalisation’ of the same behaviour (Worrall, 2004). This had resulted in young women, who would previously have been ignored, now being labelled violent offenders (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Furthermore, the sensationalised press coverage of female violence (Heimer et al, 2009) is likely to have impacted on the treatment of women entering the criminal justice system. Those working in the system have ‘been influenced by media and cultural stereotypes’ leading to their belief that ‘gender role convergence… must be a factor in the… “rise” in girls’ offending’ (Sharpe, 2009: 263).

Whilst it is recognised that violence remains a predominantly male activity (Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Hedderman, 2010) some studies have considered the effect of marginalisation and oppression on the offending of young women. Pat Carlen, in her book Women, Crime and Poverty (1988), presents an ethnographic study of 39 women’s criminal careers. Her analysis was informed by ‘control theory’, a criminological perspective that instead of considering why people break the law, considers instead why people conform. Carlen suggested that the women she interviewed had chosen to engage in criminal behaviour because:

…they had absolutely nothing to lose (and maybe something to gain) by engaging in criminal activity (Carlen, 1988: 11).

Jody Miller’s work (2008) considering African American gang members (see page 25) is similarly insightful in terms of breaking with the passive stereotype of women. Miller found that young women’s violence was in response to ‘gender-based power inequalities’, revealing her cohorts motivations for violence to be:

…Jealousy, distrust, and anger over potential infidelities, and reactions against the emotional detachment strategies adopted by young men (Miller, 2008: 177).

Perhaps unsurprisingly when Miller, along with her colleagues, considered young men’s narratives of violence it was found that male gang member considered female violence to be ‘ineffectual’ ‘cat fights’ driven by emotion and fuelled by
gossip and therefore for no good reason (Cobbina et al, 2010: 614). However, other studies reveal that young women have a more active and assertive role, with something to gain from violence. For example, some engage in fights for the thrill (Young et al, 2009) with some female gang members citing the ‘adrenaline ‘rushes’ that they experienced from offending (Batchelor, 2009: 407), and, like their male counterparts, using violence to establish identity and maintain respect (Miller & Mullins, 2006; Brunson & Stewart, 2006). As acknowledged by Batchelor, women may not be determined by their circumstances, as ‘subordination and agency’ can be ‘simultaneously realised’ and violence can act as a ‘positive contribution’ to ‘their sense of self and self-efficacy’ (Batchelor, 2009: 408). For some women, violence is clearly a means of ‘breaking out of culturally proscribed constraints and crafting their own versions of femininity and survival’ (Lopez et al, 2009: 247).

**Exploring women’s perpetration of domestic abuse**

The empirical evidence shows overwhelmingly that the male victim population does not have the same experience of severe and sustained domestic abuse as women (Archer, 2000, Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Johnson & Bunge, 2001; Kimmel, 2002; Mirrlees–Black, 1999; Richards, 2003; Walby & Allen, 2004; Roe, 2009; Saunders, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). Nevertheless, there is no doubting that there are men who suffer victimisation by women. So what theories have been presented to explain why some women perpetrate domestic abuse?

It has been asserted that women’s use of aggression against partners and ex-partners has to be understood as a reaction against the disadvantage, exposure to routine violence and psychological distress that they themselves have suffered during their lifetimes (Motz, 2008). In 1979, a prominent psychologist and feminist academic Lenore Walker coined the term ‘Battered Woman Syndrome’ (BWS). BWS encompassed distinct psychological and behavioural symptoms culminating in women’s reactionary violence as a result of prolonged exposure to situations of domestic victimisation. Between 1978 and 1981, Walker conducted interviews with
women who were, at the time, victims of domestic violence. Walker not only aimed to identify the key sociological and psychological factors that depicted BWS, but also aimed to test the cycle theory of battering, an adaptation of Martin Seligman and colleagues (1968) learned helplessness theory (Walker, 1979). Walker’s cycle of violence theory suggests there are three identifiable phases of male violence against their female partner. The first being the ‘tension building’ phase, a period of heightening tension caused by the man’s argumentativeness, during which the woman tries unsuccessfully to pacify her partner. This ‘tension-building’ phase then moves to the second phase whereby her partner becomes enraged and batter her as a result of some small trigger. The third phase is known as the ‘honeymoon’ phase during which the guilt-ridden batterer pleads for forgiveness, is affectionate and promises never to be violent again. However, despite his pleas, he breaks his promise and the cycle repeats. The repeated cycle of abuse results in the woman’s ‘learned helplessness’, characterised by her passivity, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, as well as self-blame for her victimisation. This sense of helplessness traps the woman in a situation from which she believes she cannot escape. Her own acts of violence are her ultimate attempt to save herself (Walker, 1984). The evidence does little to dispel the ‘cultural authority’ upon which the underlying premise of the BWS rests (Rothenberg, 2002: 81). These construct women as essentially weak, passive, helpless victims (Walker, 1979, 1984, 2009) and devoid of agency (Ferraro, 2003), their violence understood as a product of having lost their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172) and symptomatic of the abuse they themselves have suffered.

Overwhelmingly, research supports the idea that female perpetration should be explained as a defensive or retaliatory response to their abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979, 2004; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Muftic et al, 2007). Lisa Conradi and colleagues’ work supports this understanding, confirming that trauma is commonplace amongst violent females. In An Exploratory Study of Women as Dominant Aggressors of Physical Violence in Their Intimate Relationships, ten women underwent detailed clinical interviews and completed five written measures to examine the factors that had led to their aggression. The study found that the
women’s violence was against a backdrop of their own histories of victimisation (Conradi et al, 2009). As stated by Henning et al (2003):

...many, if not most women arrested for intimate partner violence are victims of abuse who may have acted in self-defence (2003: 841).

Their findings are in line with a study conducted by Hamberger and his colleagues (1997), which examines the motivations behind the domestic violence perpetrated by 215 male and 66 female court-referred individuals. Hamberger et al found that women were more likely than men to report having used violence to defend themselves, whereas men admitted having used violence as a form of dominance, control or punishment (Hamberger et al, 1997). Of those studies considering lethal assaults by women, self-defence, retaliation, or acts of desperation following years of victimisation were again found to be the context of their violence (Browne, 1987; Browne & Williams, 1989). More recent studies paint the same picture, finding the motivating factor for women’s physical aggression to be their attempts to minimise their own injury (Flemke & Allen, 2008; Seamans et al, 2007; Ward & Muldoon, 2007). Swan and colleagues, following a systematic review of research into motivations behind domestic violence, found that:

Women’s physical violence is more likely than men’s violence to be motivated by self-defence and fear, whereas men’s physical violence is more likely than women’s to be driven by control motives (Swan et al, 2008: 301).

Again a review of literature specifically summarising evidence regarding heterosexual women’s motivations for using domestic violence, also found self-defence and retaliation to be commonly cited (Blair-Merritt et al, 2010).

In terms of the context of women’s defensive or retaliatory actions, research suggests that the relevant context may be very wide. Hamberger et al (1997) argue that it is too simplistic to ask: ‘Who initiated the violence?’ They maintain that the history, the development and the individuals involved must also be considered, finding that approximately one third of women arrested for violence
against their partner had used violence to protect themselves, or to retaliate (Hamberger et al, 1997). Whilst many of the women acknowledged initiating the violence, generally it was against a male partner who initiated violence more often and had in fact started the overall pattern of aggression. For Hamberger et al, women could not only be defending themselves from a direct attack, they could be initiating defensive or retaliatory violence within a context of fear stemming from past abuse (Hamberger et al, 1997). Whilst one investigation of 24 cases of females killing their intimate partners found that in 40% of the cases it was the women who had initiated the violence and only 21% of the women were responding to ‘prior abuse’ or ‘threat of abuse/death’ (Jurik, 1989), one needs to consider just how ‘prior’ the abuse can be to still be perceived as threat. For example, it has been suggested that past abuse may, or may not, have been at the hands of their present partner (Irwin et al, 2010). A woman may perpetrate abuse in her new relationship even though her current partner is not abusive to her, as her ‘fear trigger mechanisms’ are so sensitive that she continues to ‘protect’ herself in the present from the past (Irwin et al, 2010).

Whilst the studies considered thus far put female perpetration within a defensive or retaliatory context, not all research defines violent women’s motivations so narrowly. It is recognised that some women act violently without provocation (Byrd & Davis, 2009; Swan & Snow 2003). Swan and Snow in 2002 looked specifically at women’s violence, developing a typology for abusive relationships. Their cohort consisted of 108 women (nearly all abused by their partners) who had in the six months prior, used physical violence against their partners. The researchers identified four types of domestic violence relationship - Victims, whereby the partner committed more severe violence, or coercion against the woman, than she committed against him; Abused Aggressors, whereby the women used more violence and coercion against her partner than he did against her (revised from Aggressor type in 2003, recognising the ‘significant abuse’ that the women in this group suffered by their partners); Mixed-Female Coercive relationships, whereby the women’s use of coercion was equivalent to, or greater than her partner, but the partner was much more violent; and, Mixed-Male Coercive relationships, whereby
the partner was more coercive than the woman, but the women’s use of violence was equivalent to, or greater than the partner’s.

Whilst Swan and colleagues’ work provides a more nuanced understanding of the abusive relationship dynamic by acknowledging that some women can be more violent than their partners, other research has considered what motivates non-victimised women to be violent in the first place. Whilst the idea that violent individuals might feel angry, or want attention is not really a revelation, a number of studies have confirmed these as motivational factors of women’s violence (Miller & Meloy, 2006; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Seamans et al, 2007). Seamans and colleagues carried out structured interviews with 13 women referred for treatment in a batterers’ intervention programme. They found that as well as anger, getting attention, or being heard by a partner, were common motivations for the women’s violence (Seamans et al, 2007). Other studies have supported Seamans et al’s (2007) findings that getting a partner’s attention (Stuart et al, 2006; Weston et al, 2007; Olson & Lloyd, 2005), or getting through to their partner (Carrado et al, 1996) can be a trigger for some women’s aggression, though whether this makes female perpetrators different to men merits further consideration.

**Violence perpetration in Lesbian Partnerships**

Whilst the focus so far has been heterosexual women’s violence, the dynamics of domestic violence within lesbian relationships could offer a valuable insight into female perpetration in general. So what theoretical explanation is there for domestic abuse within lesbian relationships? The feminist promotion of a gender based analysis of domestic violence depicting men as perpetrators and women as victims has been criticised for failing to recognise violence within same sex relationships (Perilla et al, 2003). It has been suggested that this leads to the misconception of lesbian relationships, that either it must be the ‘butch’ partner who is the ‘male’ perpetrator and the ‘femme’ who is the female victim, or that abuse does not occur between two ‘femme’ women, or even within lesbian relationships at all (Merrill, 1996). One study offers a unique insight into abusive
same sex relationships. Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester (2015), in their book titled *Domestic violence and sexuality – What’s love got to do with it* (2015), illuminate the complex way that gender can be implicated in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, or queer (LGBTQ) abusive relationships and make a unique comparison between the LGCTQ experience and the heterosexual experience of abuse. The book discusses the findings of their multi-method research project that used surveys, focus groups and interviews and a new framework of analysis that the researchers termed ‘practices of love’ to explore the participants experiences. This research found that more than a third of the 746 survey respondents (38%) said that they had experienced domestic abuse at some time in a same sex relationship (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 97), 40.1% of which were lesbian respondents (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 100). An even greater number of respondents indicated that they had experienced at least one form of negative, or potentially abusive behaviour from their same sex partners (54%) (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 97). These findings are statistically comparable to the 43% of heterosexuals experiencing domestic abuse at any time since the age of sixteen (ONS, 2015). Donovan and Hester (2015) identified similarities in terms of the range of abusive behaviours, experiences and impacts of such behaviour, regardless of whether respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, or queer. However, some notable differences were identified, i.e. gay, or bisexual men were significantly more likely than lesbian, bisexual, or queer women to experience physically and sexually abusive behaviours. Interestingly, the research also identified that risk factors for potential abuse and heightened impact included age, lower income levels and lower educational attainment and that these factors were more marked than gender. Furthermore, being newly ‘out’ positioned an individual as more vulnerable to abuse regardless of their age.

The most illuminating part of the study, however, offers insight into the complexity of power/gender dynamics that can exist within abusive relationships. The researchers found from the interview data two relationship rules operating in relationships characterised by domestic violence and abuse i.e. that the relationship is for the abusive partner and on their terms; and that the victim/survivor is responsible for the care of the abusive partner, and the
relationship. However, the researchers found that these rules are established through ‘practices of love’ that confuse the recognition of domestic abuse and expectations about gender (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 22). Abusive partners were found to enact behaviours associated with both masculinity i.e. making the key decisions in the relationship and femininity i.e. expressing need and neediness. Whilst victims were found to enact behaviours associated with both femininity i.e. providing care and nurture and masculinity i.e. being responsible for their abusive partner and being emotionally stronger. Furthermore, the abuser might tell their partner they love them and this acts as ‘glue’ that keeps the victims in the relationship (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 23). Donovan and Hester (2015) assert that these practices of love can confuse the recognition of domestic and expectations about gender in both same sex and heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, they assert that the public story that physical abuse between two men, or two women is a ‘fair fight’ must be challenged, as violence and abuse in same sex relationships is characterised by power and control by one partner over the other, and not by mutual abuse (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 214).

Donovan and Hester’s (2015) assertion that the way we talk about women-to-women violence needs to be challenged is supported by Rebecca Barnes’s work titled ‘Suffering in a silent vacuum’: Women-to-women partner abuse as a challenge to the lesbian feminist vision (Barnes, 2010). Using data from her interviews with 40 UK women who self-identified as having been abused in a previous same-sex relationship, Barnes illuminates the ‘silence and denial’ of lesbian women who had experienced abuse (Barnes, 2010: 233). She concludes that ‘the pervasiveness of expectations of mutuality and non-violence in woman-to-woman relationships contributed to the silence and denial which surrounds women-to-women partner abuse’ (Barnes, 2010: 233). Barnes maintains that if lesbian women are to be afforded an explanatory framework for their experiences of abuse, the ‘lesbian utopia’ central to traditional ‘lesbian feminist ideals’ must be confronted, making way for an understanding that recognises that lesbian women can be victimised in their relationships (Barnes, 2010: 233).
A utopian view of violence free lesbian relationships has also been challenged as a fallacy by Janice Ristock (2002). Ristock (2002) conducted interviews with 102 lesbians who had experienced domestic abuse and 80 service providers. She found that relevant to her cohort’s abuse was their social isolation, their invisibility and their fear of homophobia. The role played by social isolation and homophobia was apparent in almost half of the women who had experienced abuse during their first lesbian relationship from partners who were already ‘out’ (a term used to describe lesbian, or gay individuals who have made their social network aware of their sexuality). Power clearly remained pertinent in these women’s relationship, the fact that they were not yet ‘out’ contributing to their vulnerability, as the fear of being ‘outed’ prevented them from reporting their abuse. Furthermore, twenty of the women interviewed had experienced sexual assault, or rape, but were too ashamed that they had been attacked this way by another woman, perhaps illustrating their own misconceptions that women do not, or should not, abuse. Whilst the power control construct did fit with some of the women she interviewed, the perpetrator was not always the woman with the greatest social, or physical status. For example, women who were better educated and in better jobs, or women who were physically bigger and stronger, could also be the victim; findings consistent with earlier research (Renzetti & Miley, 1996). Furthermore, Ristock (2002) found that power and therefore perpetration did not permanently reside with one party. The dynamic could shift within that relationship, or the abused could become the abuser in a subsequent relationship. Like Donovan and Hester (2014) and Barnes (2010), Ristock’s findings led her to believe that feminist theories should not be used as a ‘regime of truth’ for same sex domestic abuse (2002: 132).

**Conclusion**

It is possible from the empirical data to paint a gendered statistical picture of who experiences more, suffers more and seeks the support that they need more. Having tested the key claims made by groups campaigning for men’s rights against empirical evidence, presented in both the academic literature and
practitioner accounts, it has been established that there is no symmetry between male and female experiences of domestic abuse. The empirical evidence shows overwhelmingly that the male victim population does not have the same experience of severe and sustained domestic abuse as women (Archer, 2000, Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Johnson & Bunge, 2001; Kimmel, 2002; Mirrlees–Black, 1999; Richards, 2003; Walby & Allen, 2004; Roe, 2009; Saunders, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). Whilst male victims' experiences are often self-defined as ‘insignificant’ (Dobash & Dobash, 2004: 340), or ‘inconsequential’ (Gadd et al, 2003: 108), what most female victims experience is incomparable and distinctly marked by fear coercion and control (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2007, 2013; Lombard, 2013).

It follows therefore that the lack of demand by men on services (Taylor, 2013: 5) and the inability of women’s services to cope with demand (Stelmaszek & Fisher, 2013; Women’s Aid, 2015) is reflective of women being the most frequently injured and fearful (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2007, 2013; Lombard, 2013). The accuracy of these findings has been challenged on the grounds that male victimisation is ‘hidden’ due to a reluctance of men to report their experiences. The evidence shows that whilst there is likely to be a male reporting deficit, largely due to reporting barriers experienced by gay men, one could argue that levels of male victimisation such as they are measured by surveys also reflect many men’s culpability as perpetrators (Gadd et al, 2002).

In terms of the international concern that more women are being processed through the criminal justice system for violent crimes (Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Carrington, 2006; Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012; Hand & Dodd, 2009), there are explanations for such increases. Such rises in female offending cannot be attributed to women’s liberation, as the ‘vast majority’ of women who have committed crime are in fact the most marginalised of women in our society (Carlen, 1988: 10). A more plausible explanation for the rise in female crime rates is changes in policy, policing, sentencing and reporting of women (Brown, 1986), the ‘soft policing’ of women’s behaviour having been replaced with the ‘criminalisation’ of the same behaviour (Worrall, 2004), resulting
in young women who would previously have been ignored, now being labelled violent offenders (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Whilst some women are violent towards their partners because they are angry, want to get their attention, to be heard, or to get through to them (Seamans et al, 2007; Stuart et al, 2006; Weston et al, 2007; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Carrado et al, 1996), whether this makes female perpetrators different to men is clearly contestable. Research generally supports the idea that much female violence perpetration is defensive or retaliatory (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Muftic et al, 2007) and that women’s violence should be considered against a backdrop of their own histories of victimisation (Conradi et al, 2009). As contextual similarities can be seen between heterosexual and lesbian women in that they have often previously suffered abuse (Kaschak, 2001), perhaps what is needed in order to understand both heterosexual and lesbian abusive relationships is a theoretical framework that does not focus its structure around the dichotomies of sexuality, but instead one that extends to include contextual diversity.

Nevertheless, the relevance gender plays in abusive relationship, remains contested. On the one hand, we have family violence theorists (Straus, 1979; Straus et al, 1996, 2003) and men’s rights campaigners who continue to argue perpetration symmetry (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind). Their reductionist view of gender as sex difference is one that sees it as merely an individual demographic variable, believing that gender is irrelevant to how individuals behave (Anderson, 2005). As noted by Kimmel (2002):

...what is missing, oddly, from these claims of gender symmetry is an analysis of gender (Kimmel, 2002: 1344).

On the other hand we have those who, view domestic abuse simply as the expression of patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979, 2004), a fixed and timeless top down hierarchy that fails to conceptualise how gender might be intersected with other structural inequalities such as class, or race. Conceived thus, one is left without adequate explanations for non-defensive forms of female violence, the only option being to frame women who act violently without any provocation as ‘bad’ women who have transgressed the gender norm.
In order to fully illuminate how gender and power are implicated in abusive relationships, where the man is the victim and the woman the perpetrator, it is necessary to move beyond such polarisation. Only by developing an understanding that is no longer founded on oversimplifications can we embrace the complexity of abusive relationships and in turn establish support that appropriately meets the needs of the male victims and the female perpetrators. This does not mean abandoning analyses of the role of gender and power in domestic abuse. This does mean however recognising the complex ways in which gender is intersected with other structural hierarchies, as well as individual biography. Though invariably patterned by gender, there are limitless configurations of how power might present in both the enactment of violence and in its telling in the aftermath of conflict. Hence, by moving beyond the essentialist construct of gender which frames women as the oppressed and men as the oppressors, we may begin to understand the experiences of victims and perpetrators of abuse. This journey must be taken with the knowledge that by accepting that men can suffer at the hands of women, the powerful position men still occupy over women within our society is not denied, nor is the fact that it is women who are predominantly the victims of abuse by partners and ex-partners. Furthermore, it should be considered whether all men who are violent are powerful, or at least in what senses they are powerful sometimes and powerless at other times. As argued by Newburn and Stanko:

Insufficient attention is paid to the complexity of criminal victimisation…Victims are characterised as helpless and vulnerable…such descriptions fail to tackle the complexity of relationships between ‘offenders’ and ‘victims’ (1994: 153-154).

In what follows I explore this complexity of criminal victimisation, by exploring how individual’s accounts are shaped at a structural level, by the gendered discourses surrounding domestic abuse, and also at an individual level, by their unique biographical experiences.
Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter I present the methodological and ethical issues involved in intervening male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse. I outline who the interview population were and where they were accessed. I then describe the interview process, the measures put in place to ensure that the participants’ consent was informed, together with the ethical parameters within which confidentiality was offered and the safeguards put in place to minimise causing emotional harm to participants. The practices adopted to ensure data security are explained. Furthermore, the chapter also provides an overview of the two methods of analysis used - Psycho-discursive (see Chapters 4 and 6) and psychosocial (see Chapters 5 and 7). I conclude the chapter by identifying one instance in which I strayed from the principles of the Free Association Narrative Interview method (FANI) (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), to evidence the reflexive learning that undertaking this PhD entailed.

Preparatory stages and ethical dilemmas

In 2011 I sought approval to gain access via support services to male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse, with the intention of interviewing this sample about their experiences. Ethical approval for this project was granted by the University of Manchester Ethics Panel the same year. However, two main points of concern were raised by the panel. Firstly, the use of ‘gatekeeping’ domestic abuse service providers to gain access to potential participants raised concerns that the provider may select participants making the sample less representative, or that participants may feel pressured to take part, for example to ‘please’ their support worker. Secondly, that the cash sum of fifteen pounds to be given to the participant at the end of their second interview, by way of remuneration for their time, could induce individuals to take part. Regarding the
panel's first concern, it was explained to the panel that the population I wanted to access were unlikely to respond to a poster appeal (in fact only one man responded). It was explained that as they were likely to be individuals, for example, feeling embarrassed by their experiences and/or individuals finding it difficult to trust others, it would be best to access them through professional services who could offer them the reassurance and trained support that they needed both before and after participation. The panel's second concern regarding a cash payment, rather than vouchers, to the participants was met with my concern that individuals experiencing domestic abuse may find themselves having to explain to a controlling partner why they had a voucher if they had not informed them of their participations. I felt strongly that cash would be less difficult to explain/hide should the need arise. The panel accepted my justifications regarding both of their concerns, allowing me to proceed.

In addition to the practical ethical issues regarding accessing a sample and remuneration for their time, at the start of the study I was keenly aware that one of the main ethical considerations relevant to this research surrounded the psychosocial interpretation of the data. It has been argued that researchers using this method should avoid what has been termed a ‘suspicious’ approach (Flowers & Langdridge, 2007) to analysing the data i.e. not accepting what the participants say at ‘face value’ and looking for the motivations and desires that influence their accounts. Another ethical concern raised by Wetherell (2005) is that the process of interpretation ‘psychologises’ an individual and the researcher therefore runs the risk of constructing what could be an unrecognisable and possibly upsetting version of reality for that individual (2005: 169).

In response to the concern that theory driven meanings could be imposed upon the data, one has two points to make. Firstly, psychosocial analysis is part of a long and ongoing process requiring the interpretative theories to be presented to a team of researchers (in the case of this research it was my supervisory team, see Psychosocial analysis section below), discussed, challenged, reflected on (see Reflections section below) and perhaps reconsidered. Such scrutiny allows for considered interpretation free from agenda. Secondly, if as social scientists we
never look beneath the words spoken, we run the risk of completely ignoring an individual’s motivations. After all:

...taking people’s accounts at face value means assuming that people are transparent to themselves and others and that there is no depth and no mystery to their experiences. (Willig, 2012: 32)

Finally, in response to the idea that in paying attention to the psychological dimensions at work in what people say one risks upsetting them, I would agree with other commentators who suggest that refusal to ‘read between the lines’ can also carry the ethical risks of ignoring what an individual is really ‘saying’ (Willig, 2012: 61). So for example, a parent’s literal approach to interpreting their child’s claim that they ‘hate’ school could be ignoring that the statement is as likely to be motivated by uncertainty, fear and/or failure, as it is to be motivated by ‘hate’ for an institution.

Fully informed and understanding of the ethical issues I chose not to shy away from a method that offers the opportunity to access the psychic, as well as the social experience of others.

**The interview participants**

In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of men presenting as victims of domestic abuse (n=10) and women presenting as perpetrators of domestic abuse (n=10). The male victims were recruited through domestic abuse service providers and the female perpetrators were recruited through services for young women and probation referral centres. The men interviewed were between the ages of 25 years old (Ean) and 57 years old (Bill). The women interviewed were between the ages 17 years old (Abbey) and 51 years old (Marie). In terms of ethnicity, eighteen of the participants were white British. One British woman was second generation Pakistani (Alina) and one man was Malaysian (Ean). In terms of sexuality, my sample had one gay man (Adam) and one man who had experienced a homosexual relationship (Jim). No lesbian women were interviewed.
The convenience sample size was somewhat dictated by the cost and time constraints of a PhD student. Whilst ‘the tension between depth and breadth of evidence’ that ‘echoes the polarisation of qualitative and quantitative research’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 106) is recognised here, my study is of a populace about which little is known or understood. Whilst some contend that it is difficult for a single case study to reflect the complex range of experiences in the general population (Bruner, 1986: 146), it is believed that even a single in depth interview can achieve a richness and depth which empirical research involving larger samples is unlikely to achieve (Dhunpath, 2000). After all, science is interested in ‘abstracting out aspects of reality-properties of interest (ultimately variables) in order to investigate just the relations between or among these’, whether based on a whole population of stories or a single person’s story (Edelson, 1988: 89). Similarly, this study, through a complex appreciation of detailed case material, explored both the uniqueness and the commonality in participants’ stories, allowing for conceptual generalisations to be made, when suitably contextualised.

The interview process

Nineteen of the potential participants were initially approached by the domestic abuse support workers. Only one man made direct initial contact as a result of a recruitment poster aimed at male victims (Ean) (see Appendix A) (Appendix B, A recruitment poster aimed at female perpetrators received no response). Ean was provided with the research participation form (see Appendix C) and the consent form (see Appendix D) prior to his first interview and given time to consider whether he wanted to participate. The domestic abuse support workers provided all the other potential participants with the research participation form (see Appendix C) and the consent form (see Appendix D). These documents were provided at least two weeks prior to the consent to participate being requested. My (the researcher) contact details were provided in the interim. This was to allow the potential participant the opportunity and time to ask me any questions, although no participant availed of this. The potential participants had at least that two week period to decide whether they wanted to take part in the research. The forms were
aimed at a basic level of literacy as it was recognised that one in six people in the United Kingdom struggle with reading, having a literacy level below that expected of an eleven year old (Literacy Trust, 2014). Nine of the male participants asked the service provider to ask me to contact them via the telephone to arrange the interview date. The forms made it clear that a set time and date for that phone call could be specified by the participant. However, all were happy to be contacted at any reasonable time. When I contacted the participants only one decided not to take part. No reason was asked for or given. The men’s interviews took place in a museum and a library in areas local to them. The one man who had made direct contact as a result of the poster was interviewed in an office at the university. In three instances, where travelling to an interview location was an issue, the participants were interviewed in their homes. For two men this was because of mobility issues and for one man it was because he felt more comfortable in his home. The female participants were not telephoned. Instead, the service provider spoke with the women to arrange a date convenient to them on which I could carry out the interviews on the premises of the support service, or probation service with which they were familiar.

Ensuring informed consent

The complex ethical issues that this project raised were fully addressed. The importance of obtaining informed consent was recognised, as the participants were vulnerable individuals whose lives have been affected by domestic abuse. The third party recruiter was made fully aware that the potential participants should in no way, either overtly or covertly, be coerced into taking part. The participant information form (see Appendix C) and consent form (see Appendix D) made it clear that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that there would be no sanction for non-participation. Candidates for interview were not required to give reasons for not participating. They were also informed that had they wished, at any stage, to cease their participation they could do so without being pressured to continue or having to give their reasons for not continuing. The consent forms were read to all participants prior to starting the interview as an extra measure to
ensure that any illiterate participants who had not declared themselves as such were still fully informed.

**Disclosures that may ‘rebut’ confidentiality**

Just prior to the start of the first interview, clear guidance was given to the participants regarding the type of disclosures which may not be kept confidential, for example, what I perceived to be a real threat of intention to harm anyone. They were made fully aware that the police would be informed should they make disclosures of a criminal nature, that the authorities were not already aware of. The risk of disclosures being made regarding the imminent risk of harm to themselves or others was fully considered and protocols were put in place prior to starting the interview process. Participants were made fully aware that confidentiality may be ‘lifted’ if such disclosures occurred and that I would inform the service provider, my supervisors and the police in extreme circumstances. I was lucky to have the added support and expert guidance (including that of police officers) of the steering group to the *From Boys to Men* project (Gadd et al, 2014) that this research is linked to. Fortunately no such disclosures were made.

**Safeguards regarding risks to the participants**

If individuals became upset during their participation they were given the opportunity to withdraw their consent. Consent was not merely regarded as a signed document obtained prior to the start. It was also considered on-going and checked periodically throughout the process. By the very nature of the issues discussed, a number of the interviewees became upset during the process. Of the ten men interviewed, eight men appeared upset during the interview process with two men’s eyes watering (Vince; Gary), but not fully shedding tears. Of the ten women interviewed all ten appeared upset, but none of their eyes watered nor did they shed tears. Where a participant became upset, dependent upon the severity of reaction, they were given the option of moving away from the area of discussion causing distress, or were asked whether they wanted to terminate the process.
None of the participants chose to terminate the interview process. One woman described having self-harmed between interviews through the stress of discussing having murdered her husband (Jane). When I said that we should not continue with the second interview, she said that she wanted to continue with the interview as it helped to talk about her experiences. Her second interview went ahead, after which I informed the service provider that she had been distressed and may need additional support. Some participants having, mentioned an experience, chose to change the subject. This was normally surrounding issues of sexual assault. For example, Jim mentioned very briefly at the beginning of his first interview his sister’s husband’s abuse of him as a child. However, he returned to describe the experience more fully at the end of the interview. Similarly, Beth mentioned her grandfather’s incestuous assault early on during her first interview, returning to describe her experience more fully later in her interview.

I saw this as participants initially testing my reaction, only following with full disclosures once they had gained confidence in me. One participant, Mike, was quite ‘cagey’ during his first interview. At the very start of his second interview he admitted having not been completely open during his first interview, having failed to disclose his prison term for arson.

The advantage of the research being carried out in the offices of domestic abuse service providers was that trained support was at hand. Those individuals interviewed away from service providers’ offices were given, if needed, support service leaflets should they need support having spoken to me about such emotive issues. I found that having the service provider as ‘gatekeeper’ proved to be invaluable in terms of their being available to the participant for post interview support. However, as has been recognised (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 87), interviewees often benefit from having someone to talk to about their experiences. The majority of the participants who I interviewed expressed how they believed that talking to someone about their experiences had helped them.
Safeguards regarding risks to the researcher

I fully recognised that the participants were discussing emotive issues and that they may be perpetrators of violence. For this reason, where possible, the research was carried out at the premises of domestic abuse service providers who already had established safety protocols in place. If service providers' offices were not convenient for the participant, I arranged for the interview to take place in public spaces like libraries and museums, in which I rented a small private room. In some instances, as already stated, interviews took place within the home of male victims. When this happened I was accompanied by the service provider who remained outside. I found that my prior experience of interviewing violent prisoners, whether on remand, in solicitors’ offices and in their homes, was invaluable during the fieldwork process in terms of recognising my vulnerability. So for example, I was careful not to disclose where I lived or went out. I was mindful of the clothes that I wore i.e. that they could not be conceived easily as provocative, that my jewellery was not overtly ‘flash’ and I was careful to sit with clear access to the exit of a room.

Payment to participants

All the participants received fifteen pounds at the end of their second interview to cover their out of pocket expenses and in recognition of the value of their time. Whilst giving cash to participants was questioned by the university ethics panel, as the participants by their very nature were often in difficult relationships, it was believed that they could explain cash more easily than vouchers to a controlling partner should the need arise. The figure of fifteen pounds was not considered an excessive payment intended to induce participation, as the participants had experienced the inconvenience, time and cost of travelling to and from the interview venue.
Data security

My obligations under the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003 were fully observed. I ensured that the data was processed in accordance with the participant’s consent, i.e. the participant was fully aware of how their data would be used and the data was only used for the purposes for which consent was gained. The data was processed in accordance with the individual’s rights, i.e. the participant was made aware that they could contact me on the contact telephone number, or via the university, to access their data, object to its processing and/or have it destroyed at any time. Furthermore, recognising fully the sources of proliferation and the consequential vulnerability of data security, the relevant guidelines for the security of digitally held qualitative data developed by Aldridge et al (2010) were adopted from the onset of this research project. Interview transcripts and ‘field’ notes were anonymised as soon as possible. Participants’ names, place names and organisation names were replaced with unique identifying pseudonyms. All analysis took place in a private working space and between working sessions all data was locked away in a filing cabinet. Only I, my supervisors and a transcriber had access to the data undergoing analysis. To enhance security of data digitally stored, the password for computer used during the research had no less than eight digits combining letters and numbers, as well as upper case and lower case. Furthermore, the computer was not asked to ‘remember’ the password. Any portable Universal Serial Bus (USB) memory drives holding backup copies were not transported with my laptop to prevent total loss of data. ‘Housekeeping’ measures such as deletion of copies of data were regularly undertaken. Furthermore, all individuals who came into contact with the data, for example, the external transcriber, were asked to demonstrate their security procedures and sign an anonymity contract. Any temporary measures of recording, such as notes taken in the field, were held digitally and encrypted as soon as possible. As I preferred reading documents in paper form rather than on screen, any such documents were shredded using a cross cutting shredder, as soon as it became feasible. If a paper copy became a working/discussion copy, it was stored in a locked drawer. Sometime after the viva, original recordings may be destroyed, once it is possible
to carry out any future analysis using the transcripts alone. Where data is deleted, clean-up software will be used to ensure all ‘spaces’ on the computer are ‘clean’. Anonymised data sets will be stored in an academic archive allowing it to be revisited for any further necessary scrutiny, or subsequent publications.

The Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI)

The method I adopted for this research called the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) was developed in 2000 by Hollway and Jefferson. Discontent with the almost exclusively sociological focus of contemporary criminological theories, Hollway and Jefferson recognised the need to consider human subjects in their full psychosocial complexity. They understood that an individual’s unconscious motivations and desires inevitably impact on their behaviour and social interactions and that it cannot be assumed:

…people inevitably think or feel in particular ways simply because of the things that they have done, the groups they belong to, or because of the times and places in which they have lived (Gadd, 2012: 37)

Hollway and Jefferson were inspired by German sociological interviews of Second World War holocaust survivors and Nazi service personnel that elicited rich narratives from individuals who guarded both themselves and the listener from incomprehensible realities (Bar-On, 2004; Brecker, 1998; Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992). Building on the psychoanalytic ideas of Melanie Klein (1988a,b), Hollway and Jefferson adopted a theoretical model that posited us all as ‘defended subjects’ (2000: 19), whose:

…conflict, suffering and threats to self, operate on the psyche in ways that affect people’s positioning and investment in certain discourses rather than others (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 19).

The FANI enabled the capture of contradictory and conflictual narratives that reflect such unconscious anxiety. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) used it to explore
people’s fear of crime, in such a way that did not merely reduce participants’ victimisation concerns to their understanding of the risk of becoming a victim. The FANI method allows the researcher to explore an individual’s internal conflicts, attending as much to what an individual does not say, as to what they do say - the tensions between their values, desires, principles and prejudices (Gadd, 2012: 37). It is a method delving enough to capture the conflicts and contradictions that signpost an individual’s guarded subjectivities. Rather than guiding the interview using lots of pre-determined questions, the interviewer becomes ‘the almost invisible, facilitating catalyst to their stories’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 37). So for example, by inviting the interviewee to ‘Please, tell me your life story’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 37), the interviewee is free to start their story at a point relevant to them and to elaborate their experiences in a way that reveals what they want to say. Where exploration of a specific topic is required, more ‘focused interviews’ (Mishler, 1986: 99) are carried out.

Fundamental to the FANI method is the concept of Gestalt (Wertheimer, 1924). This recognises that ‘the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole’ (Wertheimer, 1944: 2). The interviewee’s ‘whole’ story ‘which is more than the sum of its parts’ is preserved (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 34). The interviewer is therefore tasked with not fragmenting or de-contextualising an individual’s narrative, but valuing its entirety. The data generated in the first interview is transcribed and a period of reflection begins. Then there is a period during which the interviewer should fully engage with the narratives, developing ‘a sense of what might be distinctive, revelatory, or perplexing about the interviewee’ (Gadd, 2012: 42). What becomes relevant for exploration during the follow up interview is, for example: avoided questions, the changes of subject, or ‘skirting over’ topics; inconsistencies, contradictions, or different accounts of the same event; unsupported assertions, or implausible accounts; and, changes in delivery style, the speaking tone, pace, or pitch, or unexpected laughter (Gadd, 2012: 42). Any other uncomfortable shuffles, or glances away by the interviewee should be noted. This process of deliberation over the data is recognised as one that is enhanced through discussion with other researchers, as it allows for other interpretations of the data to be explored (Gadd, 2012). Once the second interview
has been conducted, the data is transcribed and what has been termed a ‘pen portrait’ is written. This is a case summary encapsulating the individual’s whole story and including any contradictions and inconsistencies evidenced in the transcript (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 70). The ‘pen potrait’ allowed for further deliberation and was used for the psychosocial analysis of case studies (see My application below)

Critics of the FANI method have been vocal, questioning its validity. Pen portraits have been criticised for being too ‘definitive’ of an individual’s story, resulting in automatic revelations regarding their ‘real character’ (Wetherell, 2005: 171). Other concerns revolve around the contamination of data by the researcher. Criticism specifically of Hollway’s and Jefferson’s ‘defended subject’ suggests that it attributes anxiety to the interviewee, when in fact it is the researcher’s failure to recognise how their own unconscious anxiety or desire shapes what the interviewee says (Frosh, 2010; Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). A general criticism of the method is that the researchers own intentions and desires, only some of which are consciously known (Scheurich, 1995), may unintentionally shape the interview to fit their own agenda (Plummer, 1995). Whilst the researcher’s impact upon qualitative research has been cause for concern, it is understood that absolute objectivity is an unrealistic and impossible aim (Harding, 1991; Oleson, 2000). For Jennifer Hunt (1989), the researcher’s experience ‘mediates their understanding of the cultural and psychological world of subjects’ (Hunt, 1989: 13). This accepted, there are recognised methodological measures in place that help to counter the concerns regarding validity. Firstly, it is an important part of the interpretative process to involve other researchers, thus allowing for the consideration of other perspectives. Secondly, a process of researcher reflexivity, whereby the researcher makes note of their own emotions and is open about their ‘baggage’ (Scheurich, 1995: 240), helps to highlight any risk of imposition of ‘self’ on the data. Finally, with modern methods of saving and archiving data, they are available for others to interrogate, a level of transparency that not only serves to keep the researcher in check, but allows for any concerns over interpretation to be tested.
Of course the criticisms of FANI method could equally be criticisms of any method as there is always the risk that without safeguards that the researcher can influence and impact upon the data. This can be the true at the collection stage, whether they are administering a questionnaire, carrying out an observation, or interviewing a participant. It can also be true at the analysis stage, whether they are theming data, or interpreting it.

**My application**

Each of the ten male victims and ten female perpetrators were interviewed twice, with an approximately two week interim between interviews. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour. The participants were asked to ‘tell me the story of your relationship’. During these interviews, the individual’s own experiences (both historical and contemporary) and perceptions of domestic abuse were explored. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Consideration was given to ‘what might be distinctive, revelatory or perplexing about the interviewee’ (Gadd, 2012: 21). The follow up interview, was the opportunity to carry out a critical interrogation of any areas highlighted as requiring further inquiry and to fill any information ‘gaps’. The second interview recordings were also transcribed. Large volumes of textual data were produced i.e. The women’s interviews produced 426 pages of transcribed data and the men’s interviews produced 373 pages of transcribed interview data (Arial, Size 12, font, single spaced).

The data was then the subject of both psycho-discursive analysis (Chapters 4 & 6) with the work of Wetherell and Edley (1997, 1999) and Edley (2001) in mind (see Chapter 4 for an overview of their work) and psychosocial analysis (Chapters 5 & 7) with the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2000), Jefferson (1996, 1997a.b., 2002, 2008), Gadd (2000, 2012) and Gadd et al (2003, 2007, 2014, 2015) as inspiration, (see Chapter 5 for an overview of their work).
Psycho-discursive analysis

Discursive analysis is founded on the premise that reality is socially constructed. The world is viewed as a ‘negotiable and shifting place which cannot be understood except through language’ (Willig, 2001: 103). As stated by Foucault (1972: 36), discourse is:

…a set of statements or practices that systematically constructs the object of which it speaks (Foucault, 1972: 36).

Discourse therefore provides the framework by which objects are brought into existence and thoughts can be developed. Whilst Foucault acknowledged that things can materially exist, he maintains that ‘nothing has meaning outside of discourse’ (Wetherell et al, 2001: 73). Discourse is therefore performative, as it constructs reality as well as represents it (Burman & Parker, 1993). Foucault focused on the relationship between knowledge and power, situating discourse within that framework. He asserted power operates within ‘institutional aparatus’ for example ‘institutions’ and ‘laws’, ‘discourse’ was one such ‘aparatus’. In terms of the ‘subject’, Foucault believed that discourse itself produces the ‘subject’, the ‘subject’ being individuals who personify specific forms of knowledge within particular contexts or ‘discursive regimes’ (Wetherell et al, 2001: 80). Contemporary discourses of parenting, for example, speak of the ‘dead beat’ dad, who does not work to provide financial support to his offspring (The Jeremy Kyle Show, 2013), or the ‘ladette’, the woman who behaves in a masculine drunk and disorderly manner in public (Clout, 2008; Macaskill, 2004). These are the ‘others’ of discourse against which good parents are valued. Discourse also produces a place for the subject who must locate themselves within it. We therefore take up ‘subject positions’ that make the most sense to us, ‘becoming its ‘subjects” by subjecting ourselves ‘to its meanings, power and regulation’ (Wetherell et al, 2001: 80). Hence some women become ladettes, whilst some men fail to become involved fathers. As stated by Weedon:
Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987: 108).

With this premise in mind, the focus of my psycho-discursive analysis was the work of researchers Wetherell and Edley (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1997, 1999). They demonstrated how the men they looked at re-worked their ‘subordinate status’, discursively negotiating multiple masculinities to take up ‘subject positions’ that were empowering (see Chapter 4 for an overview of their work). Following their example, my analysis considered the ‘subject positions’ taken, or rejected by, the individuals I interviewed, paying particular attention to the power that locating themselves within a particular discourse afforded them. This process involved looking for common themes running through the male victims’ and female perpetrators’ accounts. This required me to read the interview transcriptions many times. I was careful not to influence the data with any preconceived ideas regarding the kind of things that I thought the men or women would have to say. Only once all the accounts had been digested did I start to highlight and group within a word document extracts that fit the themes that emanated from the data. In Chapter 4, I show how ten men presenting as victims of domestic abuse adopt one or more, of five discursive positions: Endurance; Chivalry; Managing ‘crazy women’; Physical competence and accountable/dangerous men; The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering. Illuminating how the men re-configured what would otherwise be emasculating disclosures of victimisation, as self-sacrificing heroism. In Chapter 6, I show how ten women with experiences of having perpetrated domestic abuse adopted one or more of three discursive positions: Victimised and damaged; Resilient and protective; Vengeful and seeking reprisal. This highlights the limited range of options with regard to how they can depict themselves, the constrained understandings of the pain they too suffered, and their own attempts to avoid shame and stigma in the contexts of domesticity, motherhood and failed and damaging intimate relationships.
Psychosocial analysis

This interpretatively driven approach looks for an individual’s biographically nuanced motivations and desires, or ‘emotional truth’ (Jefferson, 1997b: 281), that is often signposted by their discursive contradictions and navigations that they make in an unconscious attempt to guard themselves against painful realities (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Using the ‘pen portraits’, I was able to have discussions surrounding an individual’s account with my supervisory team, a process that along with reflection (see Reflections section below) allowed for the questioning of my theoretical interpretation and/or strengthening of my theoretical conviction. I found this an essential and invaluable step in the psychosocial process and one that helped to illuminate the painful realities from which individuals with experiences of domestic abuse guarded themselves. For example, Ean’s story (Chapter 5) described a ‘blemish free’ upbringing, whereby he portrayed his family as ‘very stable’ - unlike other families who experienced the ‘difficult things that happen’ - yet also spoke of being a ‘terrified child’. These contradictory claims that the method allowed me to interrogate exposed Ean’s attempt to guard himself from the reality of his abusive past and feelings of unmet masculine expectation and failure. Psychosocial analysis allowed for the complex ‘inner worlds’ (Jefferson, 2002: 63) of all participants to be explored.

Reflections

I knew from the outset of the interviewing process that I would have to listen to harrowing accounts of abuse. Going into the process, I hoped that my background of interviewing similarly vulnerable individuals who had found themselves in the criminal justice system would prepare me sufficiently for the kind of emotional journey some of the interviewees’ accounts would take me on. I recognised that the feelings that the stories might stir in me might be as much about my own life experiences as theirs. As recognised by Hollway and Jefferson, both the interviewer’s and interviewee’s:
mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned. This means that both will be subject to projections and introjection of ideas and feelings coming from the other person. (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 45)

This is why a process of reflexivity is important as it can ‘strengthen a theoretical conviction or alert us to a misreading’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 67). It can also help to explain why, as an interviewer, you may have built a rapport with one interviewee who you can identify with, perhaps sharing a number of similarities. Conversely, you may feel uneasy and/or take a dislike to another interviewee who reminded you of someone in your life who you felt negatively about. Returning to the transcript can also bring into focus instances where such interviewer-interviewee dynamics have resulted in you, as the interviewer, unwittingly straying from good methodological practice - interrupting, changing direction, or stifling the flow of the interviewee’s disclosures.

*Extract 1 and extract 2* below are from the very start of my first interview with Jane, in which she described killing her husband to end his attack on her (note the two extracts came from the beginning of Jane's first interview and followed on from each other, however, for ease of explaining the dynamics I have split them). Initially, at the time of this early phase of the interview, I felt I had been skilful by building a rapport with Jane through passing what I felt to be comments of acknowledgment and understanding. On reflection, however, I realise I had, in fact, been protecting myself from the impact of what was being said and this influenced what was actually sayable.

*Extract 1*

Steph  Okay, obviously you’ve started coming here and you’ve had an experience of domestic abuse.

Jane  Yeah.

Steph  Could you tell me about that relationship?
Jane: Well I’ve had many. Erm, one domestic abuse one that I was actually in, I’m going back a few years now, I was actually charged with murder.

Steph: Right.

Jane: I was in a relationship for five years with a man. I had a lovely life, everything was fantastic apart from I did have this violence. This domestic abuse and one day, he beat me that much, I snapped and my son had gone to football practice with his dad and it was a Sunday and I’d been beaten all-round the house. There was blood all over me walls. He broke me nose. He’d kicked me up me bottom with his steel toecaps and there was a knife on the living room table because I had made sandwiches for me son and I’d rushed in to answer me phone in the house and I must have put the knife down and as I was backing in because he’d had me on the stairs and was strangling me and whatever, I’d got away and was backing away from him. I come to the table in me living room and coffee table and I saw the knife and I just picked it up and said, “No more” and as he lunged at me, it went into his heart.

Steph: Right.

I had started the interview true to the method - ‘Could you tell me about that relationship’, a question to which you can see Jane had responded with a detailed account of her stabbing her husband, which in turn was met with my response: ‘Right’. Initially I felt proud that I had not launched into a ‘million’ questions, however on reflection a response more in keeping with the method, would have been to ‘mirror’ Jane’s closing statement, to build a rapport (Lacoboni, 2008) and encourage further elaboration/revelation from her, by saying something like - he ‘lunged’ at you, or - ‘it went into is heart’. Luckily, in spite of my not taking that opportunity, Jane did continue to talk openly about her experience. Sometime after the interview, I gave more thought as to why I had merely responded with: ‘right’ to such a graphic account of violence. This process of reflection allowed me to recall what I had actually been thinking at that time. I was surprised to recall that what
had been going through my mind, was not the shocking elements of her account - 'the blood all over' her 'walls', her broken 'nose', 'his steel toecaps', 'a knife' and the lunge into his 'heart' - but instead the 'normal' every day aspects of her account - her son's 'football practice' with his 'dad' on 'Sunday', making 'sandwiches' for him and the rush to answer the phone in the middle of a domestic chore. A retrospective consideration of why I had focussed on the mundane rather than the graphic revealed that these were aspects of her account with which, I, as a mother too, could identify: small revelations of every day family life that allowed me to see myself in this woman.

Perhaps this focus on the 'norm' was my way of guarding against the terrible details, or perhaps I wanted to like her despite what she had done. Whatever the reason, this identification distracted me from the enormity of her actions. In an unconscious attempt not to break the rapport that I felt existed between us I had found myself trying to understand how one could cross the 'line' of having taken the life of another human being, a line which can never be retraced. Jane’s story continued:

**Extract 2**

Jane And it went in about an inch and he more or less instantly started dying in front of me. I was in a panic. I was nursing at the time and I’d got a good job and everything. I’d got a lovely lifestyle. I rang me sister to get the ambulance, to phone the ambulance because I was trying to help him but I didn’t know what to do. You know, he’d got a tiny cut and there wasn’t blood squirting everywhere.

Steph Yeah, that’s the thing about stabbing, isn’t it. It doesn’t look like?

Jane Yeah and I just watched him sort of die in front of me. He turned grey and died as I was holding and I was smacking his face.

Steph And you loved him as well.

Jane Yeah, as well and when the Police and the ambulance, well the
ambulance didn’t come, a doctor’s car come and obviously with me being nursing, I knew that with no ambulance that they were pronouncing the time of his death and I was told to sit outside and me mum had just left. She used to live next door to me and she’d left to go abroad, so I was sitting on me mum’s doorstep next door and there were people everywhere - the police, you know, all the neighbours were out and then they just come out after a while and put me in the police car and when they drove me around the corner, they said, “Now we are arresting you on murder” you know, and I was charged with murder. I was obviously in that much of a state I was screaming hysterically in the car because I couldn’t believe he was dead.

Steph  Mmm, it was horrendous.

Jane  Yeah and I got sent to prison. I did three days in the cells.

Steph  What were you, you got sent to prison on remand?

Jane  Yeah, on remand. I was there for four months, then I was sent to, I was bailed to a bail hostel in Liverpool.

Steph  Right, oh right, okay, good!

In an unconscious attempt to avoid Jane’s trauma, with which I could not ‘cope’, I again strayed from being a facilitator. In an attempt to keep what she was saying ‘tidy’ I interrupted her revelations with short statements, about the lack of blood (‘Yeah, that’s the thing about stabbing, isn’t it, it doesn’t look like’); about how ‘horrendous’ it must have been; and about how she had lost someone she loved (‘you loved him as well’). I then steered the interview away from the main event – the stabbing - and associated emotions (‘What were you, you got sent to prison on remand?’) before bringing that part of the conversation to an abrupt end (‘Right, oh right, okay, good!’).

Looking back it was apparent that I had been thrown by what Jane had told me, after all this was my first interview with a woman who had killed. Such reflexivity is an essential part of the psychosocial analysis. Without recognition of the inevitable
‘projections and introjection of ideas and feelings’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 45) that inevitably occurred between myself and the individuals whom I interviewed I would not have learnt methodologically. This is an understanding of the method that is built upon with every FANI undertaken.

In the chapters that follow, I present both a psycho-discursive and a psychosocial analysis of the accounts of men presenting as victims and women presenting as perpetrators of domestic abuse. The psycho-discursive analysis of ten male victims’ accounts is presented in Chapter 4 and of ten female perpetrators’ accounts in Chapter 6. The psychosocial analysis of three male victims’ accounts is presented in Chapter 5 and of three female perpetrators’ accounts in Chapter 7.
Chapter 4

Reconstructing Victimisation: Male Victims’ Stories

Introduction

The debate about gender symmetry in domestic abuse continues. As discussed in the previous chapter, the focus on women as predominantly victimised has angered those campaigning for men’s rights, who have sought research to support their belief that men are similar, if not equal, victims of domestic abuse. On the one hand, much of the feminist literature construes violence as instrumental behaviour men are predisposed to perpetrate against women, whose subjugation they have a collective interest in (Dobash & Dobash, 1979: 57). On the other hand, we have men’s rights groups, sometimes aligned with research conducted within the ‘family violence’ tradition associated with the work of Murray Straus (1974, 1979, 1996, 2003, 2012), who argue that there is little difference between men’s and women’s rates of victimisation (Abused Men in Scotland, ManKind).

This chapter attempts to transcend the polarised terms of this debate, by addressing the following questions:

1. In what ways are abused men’s accounts shaped by gender?

And

2. What is the relationship between masculinity and abuse for abused men?

I start this chapter by exploring recent developments in the theorisation of masculinities. I begin with Raewyn Connell (1987, 1995, 2005), who proposes a model of multiple masculinities, with hegemonic masculinity - embodying the stereotypical masculine traits of power, dominance, strength and authority - held (at a particular time or place) to be the most valued. This approach is built upon by James Messerschmidt (1993, 2012, 2013), who suggests that the relationship between masculinity and violence is born out of male ‘crisis’. According to
Messerschmidt men, who fail to accomplish their masculinity through traditional means, for example by being able to provide financial support for their family, or through sport, or other high achievement, use violence as their way of ‘doing masculinities’. Then the psycho-discursive research of Wetherell and Edley (1997, 1999) is presented. This demonstrates how men discursively negotiate multiple masculinities in order to re-work their ‘subordinate status’. In so doing, they take up masculine ‘subject positions’ (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1997, 1999), positioning themselves as, for example, ‘heroic’, an attribute traditionally equated with masculinity, or as ‘new men’, drawing on competencies such as being ‘ordinary’, or ‘clever’. Whilst at first glance these positions do not appear to fit with stereotypical masculinity, they are nonetheless re-worked to demonstrate complicity with the ‘dominant masculine ideal’ (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 346).

With this understanding as a backdrop, I show how the ten male victims of domestic abuse who I interviewed bought back into heroic ‘masculine ideals’. In line with the understanding that individuals can empower themselves, or avoid vulnerability though their discursive investments (Hollway, 1989), I illuminate how the men re-configured what would otherwise be emasculating disclosures of victimisation, as self-sacrificing heroism, by adopting one, or more, of five discursive positions:

1. **Endurance.** Describing the pain, especially emotional pain, endured within their abusive relationships; a self-sacrifice, often to protect their offspring, offered as evidence of their true ‘grit’ and a mark of their heroism.

2. **Chivalry.** This is the notion that one should always protect and never harm women because they are the fairer/weaker sex. Underlying this stance is a presumption that men’s partners’ behaviours justified violence, but justification not acted on by good men committed to chivalry. This kind of self-sacrifice was often further ratified by invoking the authority of officialdom, the wise words of other male friends and/or the idea that some men, of lesser principles, would simply respond in much more brutal ways.
3. *Managing ‘crazy’ women.* This entailed rescuing damaged, vulnerable and unpredictable women from the harm they might cause themselves or others. Failure to make women see reason resulted in their being construed as crazed, sick, dangerous and poisonous, constructions that allowed men to avoid acknowledging that their acts of restraint and/or aggression were damaging. Such acts were instead configured as justifiable and heroic.

4. *Physical competence and accountable/dangerous men.* Underscoring the men’s accounts of restraint during instances of victimisation was a conviction that they would not hold back if so slighted by a man. Accounts detailing their willingness to risk sacrificing their own physical safety in order to gain control over other dangerous men not only served to portray heroism, but also evidenced that for these men the fair fight, man to man, was an acceptable norm.

5. *The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering.* Their accounts of fatherhood evidenced their struggle with becoming ‘new’ men, actively engaged with their children and sharing the load in domestic chores. Some noted how they had reluctantly conceded male privilege, revealing underlying assumptions about the continued salience of gender roles.

I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the experiential relevance of gender for male victims of domestic violence (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009). I observe that whilst the gender order is persisting and pervasive, a more complex understanding of gendered power dynamics than that offered by early feminist analysis of patriarchy is needed. Gender is relevant in terms of the way that men are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. Hidden behind attempts to buy back into heroic ‘masculine ideals’, are struggles to reconcile what it means to be a man with feelings of hurt, disappointment and unfulfilled expectations that are linked often indirectly to violence via the conflicts that happen when relationships breakdown and end.
Masculinity and violence

In trying to break with a singular notion of masculinity without losing sight of the structure of gender relations, Connell proposed 'a model of multiple masculinities and power relations' (Connell, 1987 cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 830). This was concerned with explaining how power relations such as class and race impact upon the construction and negotiation of masculine identities. Her concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ provides a normative standard of masculinity, embodying the stereotypical masculine traits of power, dominance, strength and authority (Connell, 1987, 1995). Connell recognised that despite their aspiration, most men do not meet the hegemonic ideal. Within the overall framework of gender, there are relations of hierarchy between groups of men, for example, the subordination of gay men and the marginalisation of black men and working class men by straight, white, middle class men. Though most men fall short of the hegemonic ideal, many are nonetheless ‘complicit’ with it, benefitting from institutional sexism, to greater, or lesser degrees (Connell, 1987, 2005: 79).

Connell 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 (Connell, 2005: 77).

Whilst Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity identifies the practices that guarantee the social dominance of men over women, as argued by Eriksen (2014), it is nonetheless dependent upon ‘cultural consent’, ‘discursive centrality’ and ‘institutionalisation’ (2014: 7). It can, therefore, be open to contextual resistance or change (Connell, 2005).

In criminology, Connell’s work has been applied through a framework developed by James Messerschmidt. Building on the concept of ‘Doing Gender’, introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987), Messerschmidt suggests that men attempt to accomplish a masculine identity by aspiring to a dominant, masculine ideal, which
for many men is unobtainable. Where men do not have traditional means by which to demonstrate their masculinity, often due to the inequalities of class, or race, for example, by being a ‘good provider’ (Messerschmidt, 1993: 70), they resort to crime and violence as a way to ‘do gender’, asserting their manliness (Messerschmidt, 1993: 81). Domestic violence is one such way according to Messerchmidt (1993) of affirming maleness:

Wife beaters (regardless of their class and race positions) presume they have the patriarchal right—because it is part of their “essential’ nature” to dominate and control their wives, and wife beating serves both to ensure continued compliance with their commands and as a resource for constructing a ‘damaged’ patriarchal masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993: 149).

Conceived thus, male violence can be evidence of men in crisis.

**Negotiated masculinities**

In social psychology, by contrast, Connell’s insights have been elaborated in a quite different way by Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley. They suggest that to gain a true insight into the construction of masculine identities, a psycho-discursive approach is needed (Wetherall & Edley, 1999). They observed that in some contexts, one of the most effective ways of ‘being a man’ may be to strategically distance oneself from hegemonic masculinity (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 351). Edley and Wetherell report that for each individual there are ‘multiple possibilities for masculine self-definition’ (1997: 204). Their paper titled *Jockeying for Position: The Construction of Masculine Identities* (1997) draws on the idea that people will gain a sense of their own identity by differentiating themselves from others, a point made most famously by Edward Said (1978).

Interviews with sixth form students showed that those young men who were not able to demonstrate their masculinity through rugby would negotiate their ‘subordinate status’ through adopting a ‘new man’ identity that drew on alternative
competencies, such as being clever, thus redefining their complicity with hegemony (Wetherell & Edley, 1997). In a further study of students by Wetherell and Edley (1999), men could again be seen drawing on alternative competencies in order to redefine their complicity within the hegemonic order. Some interviewees adopted a ‘heroic’ position’, a position most aligned with hegemony. These were the sporty, strong men. Other interviewees adopted an ‘ordinary’ position, disassociating themselves from ‘an exalted masculinity’ (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 343) i.e. one viewed as superior and held in high esteem. Others adopted ‘rebellious’ positions that, at first glance, appear not to conform to a stereotypical image of masculinity, but by adopting attributes such as individualism, autonomy and rebellion, albeit in more subtle ways, were nevertheless a means of ‘buying back’ into the ‘dominant masculine ideal’ (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 347).

**Men’s stories**

Free Association Narrative Interviews (FANI) were carried out with ten men presenting as victims of domestic abuse by their partners, or ex-partners, a methodology pioneered by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and later adopted by Gadd, (2000) (whose work is discussed in the next chapter). The men were between the ages of twenty five and fifty seven years old and recruited through male victim domestic abuse support services. Each of the ten men was interviewed twice – each interview lasting about an hour - spaced about two weeks apart. The men’s experiences of domestic abuse, both historical and contemporary, were explored in the first interview by asking them to ‘tell me the story of your relationship’. The follow up interview offered the opportunity to address any areas highlighted as requiring further inquiry for example, gaps, avoidances, inconsistencies, changes in delivery style, or even ‘hunches’ that the participant was not revealing all. These often formed the basis for the psychosocial analysis of the men’s accounts presented in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this chapter, psycho-discursive analysis was carried out on the transcribed data. Extracts from the stories of all ten men were considered; Vince, Mike, Bill, Adam, Ray, Ean, Rich, Jim, Gary and Matt. All the men I spoke to had stories of abuse by
their partners and some also revealed childhood experience of neglect; sexual abuse and domestic violence. In terms of abuse between parents, three men had experienced this. Four men had suffered neglect and/or non-sexual abuse by parent/s, step-parent/s, sibling/s, or grandparent/s. One man revealed having experienced sexual abuse by an extended family member (sister’s husband) and one man had experienced an assault of a sexual nature by other children, as well as an attempted assault by a male stranger (for a quick reference table of men’s accounts of abuse in childhood by type see Appendix E).

Enduring pain

The social context of male domestic victimisation is one of competing discourses. Whilst the traditional voice of masculinity continues to portray the male victim as the ‘antithesis of masculinity’ (Sundaram, 2004: 66), in a backlash against feminism, contemporary men’s rights discourse not only asserts that men can suffer abuse, but suggests that it is men, and not women, who are the ‘real’ victims. That is, that it is men who most suffer in silence through fear of embarrassment (George & Yarwood 2004; Watson & Parsons, 2005), perceiving abuse to challenge expectations about men’s invulnerability (Cheung et al, 2009). By contrast, it is suggested by some pro-feminist commentators that some men are talking about their abuse by explicitly engaging in a discourse of victimisation (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Adams, 2006) and that groups of male victims have developed a ‘patriarchal peer support’, through which they assert their rights (Dragiewicz, 2008: 125) and re-affirm ‘a masculine sense of self’ (Adams, 2006: 322).

What I found is that men do speak of being embarrassed to admit their victimisation to friends or family. The insight here is not so much whether men are evidently more embarrassed than women, but that they frame that embarrassment in terms of an understanding that ‘real’ men suffer in silence, until enough is enough. Enduring ‘emotional torture’ is one presentational strategy men appear to have for explaining why they seek help from victim support services. Whilst
speaking of being a victim of domestic abuse risked conveying a physical vulnerability that could be read as a sign of emasculating weakness, enduring emotional pain could provide a means of reconfiguring victimisation as strength.

Vince, a fifty one year old white British man, expressed feeling that way. Vince was a wiry, athletic man with a noticeable tan and a face that told the story of an individual on the edge, the exhaustion that he felt ‘written’ in his furrowed brow and blood shot eyes. He started by telling me that he had suffered abuse by his partner of seven years with whom he had a young daughter. Whilst there was no physical abuse, Vince described having experienced psychological ‘torture’ as a result of his partner having openly flaunted her affair with another man. His daughter had become severely mentally and physically disabled having suffered complications from a ‘perforated bowel’. She needed constant care and Vince found himself the primary carer for her after his partner left him for the other man. Vince spoke of his reluctance to disclose to anyone the abuse that he suffered whilst he and his partner were still together:

I felt like I didn’t want to tell my family because they would think that… they wouldn’t understand because they come from a very traditional family and I didn’t want to tell my friends because I would lose face. So I kept that to myself for years and years and didn’t say that to anybody…Women are encouraged to talk or it is socially acceptable for a woman to discuss things, to talk about things and for men, it isn’t? Certain things if you mention that you have got emotions or whatever, you are seen as a wimp. It is part of this macho culture.

What Vince conveyed was reflective of the struggle Jonathan Rutherford (1992) recognised that men faced in the 1970s with the rise of feminism:

Men were caught between the old masculinities of a previous generation and a new cultural, political and sexual context which their inherited vocabularies of masculinity could not fully make sense of (Rutherford, 1992: 7).
Vince’s account revealed that such a struggle has continued for some men into the 21st century. For Vince, the limiting ‘vocabularies of masculinity’ (Rutherford, 1992) that he had available to him meant that he had remained silent for ‘years and years’ about his experience of victimisation.

Other men accessing services for male victims insisted that physical forms of domestic victimisation did not happen to ‘real’ men and/or that the natural order of things was that women were the victims of violence and men perpetrated it. Mike, a thirty seven year old white British man, adopted this position. Mike arrived for his first interview with a baby boy in a push chair for whom he had become the primary carer following the breakdown of his marriage. Mike was a big, strong looking man, probably of formidable appearance if alone, but with a toddler in tow, a softer, nurturing side was on show. Mike spoke of the abuse that he had suffered from his partner of four years, whom he had met when he was thirty-three and she was nineteen years old. Mike said that the abuse started with ‘little arguments’ and that she needed to ‘be in control of everything’, including the ‘finances’ as ‘she had to have the money going into her account’. Mike described to me how little arguments would ‘escalate’ and become ‘physical’, but that she ‘would always admit that she was in the wrong’, declaring her ‘undying love’ and telling him that she ‘could not cope’ if they were not together. Mike described the physical abuse as being ‘a slap round the face’ at first and told me how he would try to ‘diffuse the situation’. He said that the abuse got worse, escalating to her ‘strangling’ him and ‘threatening with knives’. I asked Mike if he had ever told any of his friends about his experiences of abuse he replied:

No, because it is not something that blokes suffer with, is it? You know… It is blokes that hit women, not women that hit blokes.

Although Mike argued that abuse was ‘not something’ which real ‘blokes’ suffer with he, like Vince, suggested that when enough was enough he had sought help from male victim support services. Thereafter he had spoken candidly to me of his experience of victimisation, including for example, details of being strangled and threatened with a knife, experiences that clearly did not tally with his discursive position that it is ‘blokes’ who ‘hit women’ and not ‘women’ who ‘hit blokes’. Both
Mike’s and Vince’s accounts evidenced a tension between their personal understanding, that men can experience abuse from their female partners as they had and their social understanding, that you must be a ‘wimp’ if you have suffered at the hands of a woman. However, their accounts also revealed a reworking of their victim status to fit with their perception of a ‘real’ man. By investing in the discourse of enduring pain, they provided evidence of their true ‘grit’, traits traditionally equated with masculinity. For some men the need to endure abuse was reinforced by their need to stay and protect their children. For example, Vince was resolute in his commitment to enduring ‘continual torture’ in order to protect his child:

\begin{quote}
Relationships that have ended in the past, you know, you make a clean break, but this was because of Flora [their daughter], it was very, very difficult. So it was a continual torture really.
\end{quote}

Like Vince, Mike also spoke of enduring the abuse from his partner, whilst:

\begin{quote}
Looking for a way out that also ensured the safety of erm my son as well.
\end{quote}

By voicing their ability to endure pain, despite their victim status, these men bought back into a ‘masculine ideal’. Consequently, for these men the endurance of victimisation became a mark of heroism.

\textbf{Chivalry}

Six men that I interviewed told me that they would not harm a woman because they had been brought up to believe that it was something that real men did not do. Whilst it was implied that retaliation was justified, it would not be considered a fair fight. The discourse that these men engaged in was chivalry, derived from the standards of behaviour expected of Knights in the Middle Ages (5\textsuperscript{th}-15\textsuperscript{th} centuries), emphasising not only bravery, generosity in victory, military skill and piety, but also ‘to maintain and defend women’ (Lull, 2004: 35). Whilst such benevolent sexism has been viewed as a flattering ideology which emphasises complimentary gender
roles of the nurturing, kind and delicate female and the cool, strong competent male protector (Glick & Whitehead, 2010), it has also been associated with the subjugation of women (Pryor et al, 1995). Furthermore, it has been suggested that husbands who hold the belief that women should be idealised and protected, tend also to justify the abuse of their wives should they challenge their authority as men, or violate conventional gender roles (Glick et al, 2002).

Some of the men that I interviewed shared this commitment to chivalry and its obligation to protect the fairer sex. This obligation, however, was not without hint of contradiction. Whilst these men afforded women protection, on occasion they rendered them powerless. For the women in relationships with these men, the protection/powerlessness paradox that they found themselves in, was much like the experience of women affiliated with gangs who Miller (2008) studied, whereby gender was both a risk factor for and protection against victimisation (see page 25). Whilst Mike (introduced in the enduring pain section above), Ray and Rich (introduced in the Fighting the crazed ‘other’ section) and Gary (introduced in the Physical competence and Accountable/dangerous men section), adhered discursively to the idea that you do not harm women, they nonetheless admitted to having damaged property in front of their partners (Mike; Gary), slapping them in the face (Ray), spitting in their faces (Rich), or mutual ‘pushing and shoving’ (Gary). This said, those men who did admit to such acts when describing incidents of their own victimisation, insisted they remained passive in the face of threat.

Bill was a British fifty-seven year old man who I made contact with through a domestic abuse support service. He was a small, frail-looking man who had nearly died three years earlier from pancreatitis, as a result of chronic alcoholism. When I met Bill, I instantly noticed that he had a scar near his eye and that he could not hold a straight stare. He informed me that he had been hit in the face with a glass by his wife of eight years who was also an alcoholic. Bill insisted that he had never fought back on any of the occasions that his wife had attacked him. He said he could never retaliate when his wife was violent towards him because of the way that he had been ‘brought up’:
I hadn’t got the heart to hit a woman. I don’t know if it is the way you are brought up or that I am not a violent person like.

He suggested that any physical harm that he endured was less than the emotional harm to his ‘heart’ that he would sustain should he retaliate, suggesting that he is a man of chivalrous principles. Like Bill, Mike also spoke of his upbringing preventing him from harming a woman. He told me, ‘I couldn’t bring myself to sort of retaliate in any way shape or form’. Making his beliefs about violence towards women clear, Mike explained:

You know, I have been brought up. To hit girls/women is wrong…
You know you don’t hit females.

Whilst Mike’s admission that he had ‘punched the wall’ in front of his partner could be construed as threatening behaviour, he offered it as testament to his control in that the wall got what she should have got. Underlying both Bill’s and Mike’s justifications for not hitting women is the presumption that their partners’ behaviours justified violence – that construed otherwise through the discourse of a fair fight retaliation would have been merited. For them the point is that good men committed to chivalry chose to forgo such an entitlement. Bill’s and Mike’s accounts can be contrasted with that of the only gay man (Adam) I interviewed, whose account of violence with his partner was devoid of such benevolent sexism. Adam, a forty three year old man, told me that whilst his partner had ‘never been physical’ he had been unfaithful, ‘badly possessive’ and made him ‘feel worthless’ by saying ‘nasty horrible things’ and ‘belittling’ him ‘in front of people’:

… How worthless I am and nobody likes me, nobody wants to talk to me. “I don't even know why you've got a mobile phone because no fucker will ever ring you”. That's what he used to say to me. “No-one wants to talk to you, so I don't know why you've got a phone in the first place” and all this. I'd just had enough and I jumped up and punched him and he called the police on me…Yeah, I punched him in the side of the head. He called the police and had me arrested for assault.
Whilst Adam’s relationship with violence was one in which chivalry played no part, as he viewed the violence between him and his partner as a fair fight, for Bill and Mike their commitment to chivalry meant that they had lost the fair fight entitlement. For these men, the protector discourse served as another means through which principled self-sacrifice shores up what might otherwise be emasculating disclosures about victimisation; a self-sacrifice sometimes further ratified by invoking the authority of officialdom, the wise words of other male friends and/or the idea that some men, of lesser principles, would simply respond in much more brutal ways. Bill spoke of neighbours calling the police ‘two or three times a month’. Bill recalled on one occasion:

The police came and said “take her in the bloody kitchen, and I will stand here by the door, and give her a bloody good hiding”.

Mike likewise recalled the police suggesting that he should not ‘press charges’ against his partner, but instead ‘man up’ by physically getting his partner under control. Mike also recalled being outside chatting with the bloke next door, when his partner told him to “get in here now” to which his neighbour had declared:

“If that was me, if she spoke to me the way she spoke to you, I would have smacked her”.

Mike further stated:

Yes and even though, yes I didn’t retaliate, a lot of blokes “Oh yeah, I would have turned round and smacked her one”. It was like “Well yes but that is not me”.

We see here how both Bill’s and Mike’s accounts are premised on the idea that ‘a lot of blokes’ are just not that principled. By evoking this ‘other’ brutal unprincipled man, male victims associate themselves with gallantry and strength of character, therefore buying back into notions of masculine competence and self-sacrifice in the face of their partners’ abuse, hysteria and/or unreasonableness.
Managing ‘crazy women’

Notably only three men spoke of feeling afraid (Mike; Rich; Jim, though only with one of two abusive women). I found, much like Gadd et al (2002) and Hester (2009) that the majority of my sample did not describe the abuse that they had experienced as having created a context of fear. Also in line with Gadd et al’s (2002) findings, the majority of the men’s accounts of their victimisation did not simply suggest intimate terrorism. Rather their stories were of confusing recollections of retaliation, equal combat, or even primary instigation. Most of their accounts of violence focused on their own control, echoing the findings of study in the United States that examined what men said when filing for a protection order (Durfee, 2011). From the 2,168 filings for protection orders in an American urban county in 2000, Durfee (2011) analysed 48 cases of men asking for protection from their abusive partner. The study focused on how the men were ‘still in control’ and ‘not fearful’. Furthermore, they ‘carefully’ (Durfee, 2011: 316) constructed themselves as ‘not “abusive’, with eleven men ‘explicitly’ stating ‘in their petitions that they were not abusers’, when they had used ‘active resistance’ (Durfee, 2011: 325). The men I spoke to also emphasised how their actions did not harm their partners, their attempts to control through restraint articulated as necessary to protect vulnerable and damaged women who were out of control, from harming themselves and/or those around them. Holding their partner’s arms and straddling their partners on the ground were common means of doing this, with little acknowledgment made of how intimidating such actions might be.

One man did speak of how surprised he was that his efforts to restrain were perceived by his wife as an attack on her. Ray, a fifty three year old British man, told me how he had met his wife, who was twenty three years younger than him, in Uganda whilst working for a charity. Ray’s wife, her child by another man, her three sisters and her nephew all came to live with him in the United Kingdom. Ray said that they then had two children of their own, resulting in very cramped living conditions and a huge financial strain being put on him, as he was the only earner. Ray said that he started to get ‘blamed for a lot of things’ and that ‘lies’ were made up by the women in the house about him. He described getting ‘a lot grief’ which
he said ‘looking back’ was ‘abuse’. Ray also described the abuse becoming physical, including him being ‘bitten’ and ‘punched’ by his wife. But what pre-empted the bite mattered. Ray’s description of having to restrain his wife showed a complete lack of awareness on his part of how his actions may be perceived by her. His method of restraint involved ‘getting her down on the floor and hold[ing] her still on the floor’ until he ‘felt she had calmed down’. To his surprise, during one such incident she had bitten him and accused him of causing her ‘physical harm’. However, his lack of insight into her perspective was evident:

…all I had done was restrained her from causing me any damage.

A closer look at the transcripts revealed that when the men perceived that they had failed in their attempts to make their women see reason they re-construed them as crazed, sick, dangerous and poisonous. These women justifiably needed to be restrained. Six of the men that I interviewed were particularly forthcoming with references to their partner’s mental state, for example, describing them as, ‘mentally sick’; ‘borderline personality’; ‘evil’ or ‘possessed’; or, even out of control as a result of pre-menstrual tension, such focus on the reproductive functions of offending females, ‘symptomatic of exertions of power in the subjugation of women’ (Leisman & Domenico, 2009: 1). Of the six men who spoke of their partners in this way, four told me that they had restrained their partners. Among them, one admitted to also having punched a wall in front of his partner and another to having spat in his partner’s face. One man - whilst he had not spoken of restraint - told me that he had ripped a door off its hinges and thrown it in his partner’s presence.

Ean was a twenty-five year old Chinese Malaysian graduate student who spoke of having to restrain his girlfriend for her protection because she was ‘quite mentally sick’ and he feared, not for himself, but that she would harm herself. Ean described having suffered emotionally as a result of her calling him ‘very abusive names’ (though he could not recall what names) and expecting ‘100% attention’ from him. Ean described how on a number of occasions he had ‘tried to restrain’ his girlfriend ‘by holding her’ to prevent her from leaving. This, he suggested, was for her own good as it was a long way for her to go home and she was known to
have previously attempted suicide. In response to being held, Ean’s girlfriend bit his hand, causing him to let her go:

She ran away… I didn’t want her to go any further. I just started to corner her. When she was unable to progress, she started to throw stones at me, which was very hurtful to me at that time. I was really shocked that she could do such a thing.

Ean told me that on this occasion he held his girlfriend for ‘about 20 minutes’, fearing she would jump out of the window. Unlike Ray, who could not conceive that his actions may be seen by his partner as abusive, Ean acknowledged that his acts of restraint may have been perceived by his girlfriend as abusive:

Yeah, she did erm, think that I was abusive towards her. Like … in the middle of the night when we quarrel… When I tried to restrain her by holding her, she thought I was abusive because I was holding too tight, which I must admit I probably did hold her too tight, not wanting to let her go.

And again:

I really love her and I was afraid for her to run away so was, in a sense, I was quite controlling.

That he presented this control as related to his partner’s needs was made apparent by the following disclosure:

I mean many times when she told me that, she actually felt happy when I restrained her, because that showed that I really er, loved her and wanted to, to salvage the relationship maybe?’

Two participants, Mike and Rich, portrayed their former female partners as ‘evil’ and ‘crazed’. Both men spoke of being afraid when under attack (two of only three men who mentioned fearing their partner). Mike spoke to me of having ‘feared’ for his ‘life’ when his partner had attacked him and spoke of having ‘punched a wall’ as well as his physical restraint of her:
I put my arms around her to pin her arms to the sides, to try and restrain her, she dug her nails into my hand and basically ripped all my skin off.

Describing his partner as an ‘animal’ - an unpredictable ‘beast’ with ‘a level of evilness in her eyes’ - Mike justified his controlling behaviour as necessary given her unpredictability:

I didn’t know whether I was going to get a normal Carol, a caring, loving Carol or an absolute animal that is going to punch me rather than look at me.

Rich, a thirty eight year old British man, also presented his partner as ‘crazy’. He had been referred to a domestic abuse support agency by the police, who believed him to be at risk of abuse by his Russian wife, whom he had met on the internet six years earlier. Rich spoke of being ‘punched’ in the face and being ‘put…down sexually’. When I met Rich he had become the primary carer for his son and stepson (his wife’s son) as his wife had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Rich had made it clear to me that he had been brought up to believe that to harm a woman was wrong and yet, by way of contradiction, he cited an incident of degrading retaliation towards his partner:

I once spat in her face because she attacked me and then she was insulting me and she spat in my face. Now I don’t do this to ladies, but I think it just come to a head and I spat back in that second.

In so doing, his partner was constructed as clearly not a ‘lady’, rather she was a ‘Medusa’ - the mythical demon of a woman with venomous snakes for hair - with ‘psychopathic tendencies’:

I’m scared. My hearts going and her eyes turn like Medusa. They go into total, I’ve never seen, it’s like these films like the Exorcist.

In fact, both Mike’s and Rich’s accounts revealed how they had taken the ‘crazy women’ discourse to an extreme by portraying their partners as ‘evil’, or
‘possessed’, as if they were prone to multiple personalities and hence particularly frightening and deceitful. If construed as damaging, unpredictable and poisonous, women could be justifiably brought under control using restraint and/or aggression. In Mike’s and Rich’s case, what might have looked like retaliation, or even provocation, was reconfigured as heroism.

**Physical competence and accountable/dangerous men**

Whilst most of the men justified their own aggression as protective restraint, or heroic paternalism, their accounts rested on claims to have been mostly passive victims. Underscoring the men’s accounts of their passivity was a conviction that they would not hold back if so slighted by a man (Toch, 1997; Kimmel, 1996). By speaking candidly of their willingness to risk sacrificing their own physical wellbeing and by taking a beating in order to gain control over other unaccountable or dangerous men, they were able to reconstruct their violence as heroic.

Jim was a fifty two year old white British man, younger than he looked, his life blighted with chronic illness, alcohol addiction and depression, suicide attempts and periods of self-harm. Jim told me about an incident when he had come home and found his wife in bed with another man:

> Well he went through a window….Oh yes. Yes. Like bump and off he went. Erm, I am not a violent person, honestly, I just saw red that night.

Jim also spoke in a similar matter of fact way about his experience of violence as a publican, whereby his role compelled him to physically maintain control of violent incidents that he said happened regularly in his pub. He said, ‘me glasses would come off, me watch would come off’ in preparation for stopping fights. Going on to jovially describe the high level of violence that he had faced, Jim boasted:

> I have had shotguns to me head, matches to my throat, you know, I have been followed to the bank, threatened, shot at… Oh yeah, yeah… “Take ‘em I don’t want ‘em, take ‘em”, but they would still
want to show their weapons and what have you. I mean there was three shootings and three or four stabbings in and outside the pub. You know, at times, I have been sat there with my finger in somebody’s hole - err belly, waiting for the ambulance to come, it was finger in and out let the bleeding, and catch it, madness it was. That was me first year there (laughs).

Although Jim admitted to me that he had once made his partner ‘terrified’ by ripping a door off its hinges, his description of his own instances of victimisation were focussed on his passivity. Jim revealed that he had been married four times and spoke of being abused during two of his marriages: one which involved ‘general threats of violence’ and a ‘constant barrage of belittling’; the other involved actual physical assaults, such as being ‘whacked’ ‘across the back of the head’ with a ‘spanner’. Jim described the attack he had suffered from his wife as follows:

...Though she had leathered the crap out of me and I was covered from head to toe with Bakelite, I just seem to recall being on the floor and I just looked up and she just had the telephone cable in her hand and I went “Where’s the phone?” She went “In your f-ing head” (laughs) and I just laughed.

Jim thus presents this account of violence as evidence of his restraint, as rather than physically retaliating he had ‘just looked up’ and ‘just laughed’.

Gary also spoke of his being able to handle himself when confronted with violent men, whilst emphasising his restraint during incidents of conflict with his partners, whom he maintained had abused him. Gary was a forty- three year old British man, who suffered from clinical depression and alcohol related illness, which had left him ‘partially brain dead’ and unable to use his hands and legs properly. Whilst I initially assessed that his story did not fit within my partner, or ex-partner abuse remit, the interviews revealed that Gary had in fact had an intimate relationship with the women he referred to as his ‘carer’. Gary spoke of his experience of
violence as a doorman, highlighting his physical dominance in situations of conflict with other men:

>You don’t get paid for doing nowt unfortunately. Yeah, obviously you get to see a lot of violence. Some days worse than others…
>Saturday night and you are finding yourself throwing eighteen people out in one go.

Gary admitted that there had been mutual ‘pushing and shoving’ and an incident whereby he insisted that he had defensively thrown a ‘baking tray’ at his partner, because she was trying to stab him (although he was found guilty of assault). At the same time, Gary emphasised his restraint during incidents of conflict within his relationships. He told me how he would physically remove himself from situations of conflict with his ‘carer’:

>I’d have to leave, would go leave her for a couple of hours, go off into town, do some shopping or something, just get out the way and let her calm down. She used to be a different person again afterwards.

Gary described one incident whereby she had hit him whilst he was driving, an account which also emphasised his ability to maintain composure:

>She smashed me straight on the face with her fist while I was driving and nearly hit a car coming the other way. So I dropped her off at work and decided enough was enough.

Whilst these men emphasised their passivity during instances of conflict with women, they were undoubtedly empowered by speaking of their physical competence when confronting accountable and/or dangerous men. For these men the fair fight was clearly a conceivable norm.
The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering

Five of the men that I interviewed had become the primary carers for their child/children after the breakdown of their relationships (Matt; Vince; Mike; Rich; Jim - though in Jim’s case only for a year before returning his children to their mother, he resuming the role of ‘breadwinner’). Whilst it is suggested that gender roles have evolved - resulting in the construction of a ‘new’ image of fatherhood, definitive of those who can be caring, nurturing and more involved in childcare than previous generations (Pleck, 1997; Finn & Henwood, 2009) - there is still evidence that nonconformity to traditional gender roles evokes negative reactions (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). The accounts of the five men that I interviewed evidenced their struggle with becoming ‘new’ men, born out of a reluctance to sacrifice male privilege and reflective of the expectations that they had of female partners in the first place.

What was apparent from the fathers in my sample was they perceived the natural order of things to be that women look after the children. A very different finding to that of Deborah Lupton and Lesley Barclay, who carried out semi-structured interviews of sixteen couples (with men and women interviewed separately), whose men gave little recourse to the notion that women are ‘naturally’ better at caring for children, than are men’ (Lupton & Barclay, 1997: 140). For the men I interviewed, masculinity was about freedom, freedom to pursue a career, freedom to go to the pub, freedom to play and watch sport, or go to the gym when they wanted. They spoke in terms of fatherhood having forced them to sacrifice that freedom and their accounts evidenced contempt for the inadequate or neglectful mothers who had trapped them into the role. Whilst there was an acknowledgement by the men that to be a good father they would have to sacrifice their masculine pursuits, that sacrifice did not have to be absolute. As was the case with Lupton’s and Barclay’s male cohort, who were described as having ‘constantly’ drawn on ‘transformation’ and ‘adjustment’ discourses (Lupton & Barclay, 1997: 124), the men I interviewed also described a negotiation period in which they sought a balance between ‘new’ and ‘ideal’ masculine identities.
Matt was a twenty eight year old British man, who had sought the support of a domestic abuse support service for male victims following the breakdown of his six year relationship with a woman four years his junior, a care leaver and just eighteen years old when they started seeing each other when he was twenty two. Matt told me that they would have ‘a lot of arguments’ and that on one occasion his girlfriend ‘kicked’ a wine bottle at him and it had ‘smashed’ in his ‘face’ resulting in a scarred ‘eye’ and ‘a fractured cheekbone’. Matt said his partner also made at least six false accusations against him, including the claim that he had strangled her and smashed up the house, some of which had led to his arrest but concluded in no further action being taken against him. When the relationship broke down, the court decided that his three children should reside with Matt during the week. Matt believed parenting came more naturally to women:

Personally I think bringing up kids is natural to women. I don’t want to sound sexist or anything... but I think men are more a bit you know ripping down engines and stuff like that, not used to changing nappies and stuff. It was very hard for me to get used to.

Whilst Matt was the only man I interviewed to use positive terms such as ‘rewarding’ and ‘brilliant’ to describe being a dad, he also spoke of the socialising opportunities that he had sacrificed as a result of becoming the primary carer for his three young children:

… as soon as the kids were with me most of my mates didn’t call, didn’t knock on. Because they think, “Oh you can’t go to the pub”. “We can’t come round and have a laugh and that if you’ve got the kids there”. I thought, “Oh God”, I thought, “I can’t do this. This is not me”. I lost my way of life if you like, way of living.

Vince also focused on the sacrifice involved in fathering, telling me that he had considered what he stood to lose even before having had a child:

My view of having children, I will have to make sacrifices, huge sacrifices. So you wouldn’t be able to go and watch City play Manchester United if something happened. You wouldn’t be able
to go mountain biking…, or you wouldn’t be able to, all these things that I really enjoy, I wouldn’t be able to do… and as long as I’m content that’s ok. But if I’m thinking “well actually I’m not sure about that”, then you know, don’t have a child.

It was his mother’s self-sacrifice that inspired him, however:

She would not be interested at all in men, she would just, so that kind of stopped and it was just me and her and she devoted her life and sacrificed everything, some might say the best years of her life, for me. So that’s the way I am with my, with Carla. I will always put her first.

Conversely, Vince’s portrayal of the mother of his child was anything but positive. He described her as a ‘serial adulteress’ who ‘can’t cope’ and did not genuinely ‘want’ their daughter, but was motivated to try to get custody because of the substantial damages awarded for medical negligence which had resulted in her disability. Vince spoke of how his partner getting pregnant had been a ‘trap’, which he did feel had resulted in a significant loss to him in terms of ‘lifestyle’ a loss made all the more significant given his child’s severe mental and physical impairment:

I felt we had had a child to almost trap me into the relationship in some ways because I had got a very good lifestyle. I used to go out and do all the things I wanted to do. I had a job I really enjoyed, my own house, a nice sports car.

Mike also told me how his partner’s inadequacy as a mother had forced him to give up a good job to look after his son, as a Freelance Information Technology Consultant which paid him ‘a silly amount of money’:

I was on Jobseekers’… well I was on employment support allowance basically because she couldn’t be left on her own with Alfie after admitting wanting to harm him… So basically I had to give up work to basically provide care for Alfie.
Matt also described his new role as carer for his three children as one that was forced on him by his partner who was a ‘terrible’ mother, ‘very selfish’ and ‘neglectful’ towards his children:

Well at first, when I took the kids on, well let’s be fair, when they were dumped on me before court.

Apparent in all the men’s stories of fatherhood was their feelings of having been forced into a role that had resulted in sacrifice in terms of either materialistic symbols of masculinity like the ‘nice sports car’, or the ‘silly amount of money’, or the freedom to engage in masculine pastimes like sport, pub and ‘ripping down engines’. This said, Vince’s, Mike’s and Matt’s accounts revealed that whilst they felt the loss of a traditional male identity, all three men claimed to have sought to balance their ‘new’ men identities and that of their stereotypical idea of masculinity. They achieved this by finding opportunities to engage in ‘manly’ pursuits part-time. Matt spoke of the ‘lads’ things’ he started to do again at the weekends in one ‘breath’ and in the next spoke of his domestic duties, indicative of his ‘ideal’ and ‘new’ lifestyle balance:

Go out fishing with my mates or we break cars down and sell the parts, just do the lads’ things, or I put the house back together after the kids have wrecked it, you know jobs around the house and that.

Mike, who had struggled with having to give up a good career, assured me that despite one failed attempt to get his son ‘settled in nursery’, he was continuing to seek a balance between being a financial provider and carer, stating that ultimately he wanted:

To be able to work and care for my son.

Whilst Vince had portrayed fatherhood as something which had resulted in complete sacrifice of his own hobbies, he spoke to me of having started to take up what he described as ‘truly cathartic’ activities again, whilst his daughter was at
school. A dichotomy of stereotypical masculine performance of stamina and strength contrasted the sensitive appreciation of a sensory experience:

I joined the gym. Now I don’t, it’s not a gym as such. There’s no, you know, the men, none of the men there I’ve seen have got tattoos… When Flora’s at school like during the day and I can do thirty to forty five minutes on the weights, on the machines. I tend to go out for a run as well sometimes. I mean the running is really important to me. And then I go and have a swim. I’ve had a swim every day for about three months, every single day… truly cathartic, and a forty five minute swim… Then there’s a foot spa upstairs, a couple of saunas and there’s an aromatherapy sauna which is about the size of this room. And it’s dark and there’s little sort of lights on the scenery and they change colour and they’ve got like eucalyptus and tea tree oil and they smell really nice. That’s got me through and I find if I’m just like pumping iron, thrashing myself on the machines, go for a swim, come out and I’m really calm and that is the, that is, that’s really helped me. And I’ve also got a season ticket at City, which I couldn’t have gone before… That’s good cos the people that I sit with I’ve sat with for years and years and, of course, I don’t mention any of this. It’s just focus on the football and I love football so that’s great. That’s my release… I feel so sort of healthy that I almost feel like scratching myself with a rusty nail to see how quickly I heal up.

In the first part of his account, Vince makes reference to the tattooed gym users, differentiating himself from the stereotypical macho type that could be found in a gym. Nonetheless, his account of the ‘every day’, ‘weights’, ‘run’ and ‘swim’, still normalised the showcasing of masculine endurance. By contrast, his account continues in a much more sensitive vein, with his description of ‘little sort of lights’ and ‘really nice’ smells. The last part of his account reverts again to conveying very masculine imagery of ‘pumping’, ‘thrashing’, football supporting and an almost superhero testing of his powers of healing. These conflicting overtones revealed
how, for Vince, once his daughter had started school, the gym had become a setting in which he could not only re-establish his physical competence, but also one in which an exhausted and arguably depressed ‘new man’ could recharge and embrace a sensitive masculinity with his appreciation of scents, lighting and scenery.

**Conclusion**

Whilst they presented as victims, the men whose stories were shared in this chapter did not describe the kind of impactful, severe and sustained violence, coercion and control that we know some female victims of domestic violence suffer (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013), but instead offered confusing revelations of retaliation, equal combat, or even primary instigation, with little reference to fear (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009). Gender was relevant in terms of the way that men are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. The common ‘thread’ running through what these men had to say was their portrayal of women as vulnerable individuals, who did not know their own minds. Even women who were violent were considered in need of male support. The men presented themselves as those whose moral codes dictate that they must protect ‘their’ women from harming themselves, or others, even if that entailed the risk of recrimination. By adopting one or more discursive positions - i.e. *Endurance; Chivalry; Managing ‘crazy women’; Physical competence and accountable/dangerous men; The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering* - they re-worked their experiences of abuse as self-sacrificing heroism. They presented their endurance of abuse as ‘torture’ and hence as testament to their heroism.

Most adhered to the paternalistic idea that women are the frailer sex, who they did not fear. Though women should expect to be put in their place (which it is implied would be easy), they should also be protected from harm, so the stories went. Some men presented themselves as rescuing damaged, vulnerable and unpredictable women from the harm they might cause themselves, or others. Failure to make women see reason resulted in their being construed as crazed,
sick, dangerous and poisonous ‘Medusas’. Within this framework the men’s investments in the ‘protector of women’ discourse remained unchallenged, as their own acts of restraint and/or aggression were directed towards ex-partners whom they differentiated from ‘normal’ women deserving of chivalry. The fear that some men described when confronting ‘crazy women’ was in sharp contrast to their tales of courage and physical competence when faced with conflict from dangerous men. For those men who had become the primary carers to their children, fatherhood was seen as a sacrifice of their male identity, a role alien to them, but one that they believed had come naturally to women. The men’s accounts of being dads revealed how they attempted to regain their masculinity by re-engaging with ‘manly’ pursuits, such as sport and work.

Listening to such accounts of self-sacrificing heroics, it was easy to forget that these men had presented as victims of abuse. Relationships with women were construed by them as, at best, dysfunctional projects of reform and, at worst, tainted by untameable evil. It is easy to see how the female subjects of such typecasting might struggle to feel and/or react positively to men in these relationships. What is harder to see at first blush is how hidden behind some men’s attempts to buy back into a heroic ‘masculine ideals’, are a range of psychological struggles, often involving attempts to reconcile what it means to them to be a man, with the feelings of hurt, disappointment, unfulfilled expectation and emasculating experiences of victimisation. Rather than confront these feelings, the men I spoke to re-fashioned the emotional landscape of being a victim in ways that reasserted masculinity as a form of heroic endurance of suffering and abuse. This chapter has illuminated the need to explore the varied manifestations and experiences of power that exist within abusive relationships where men feel victimised. The findings suggests the continued need for analysis sensitive to the patterning of inequality gender provides, but questions the utility of the concept of patriarchy to the extent that it assumes an entirely predictable and unilateral structure of oppression.
Chapter 5

A Psychosocial Understanding of Three Male Victims:

Jim, Ean and Gary

Introduction

In Chapter 4 a psycho-discursive exploration of male victims’ accounts revealed how the men who I interviewed had shied away from the popular media representation of men who have experienced domestic abuse as ‘broken’ and ashamed, instead re-configuring emasculating disclosures of victimisation as evidence of their heroism. Undoubtedly such psycho-discursive analysis is important, as it illuminates how identities are produced by discourse that in turn can ‘come to structure how we all think, feel and talk’ (Edley, 2001: 224). However, the method has its limitations in that it disregards the ‘private manifestations of discourse such as thought and self-awareness’ (Willig, 2001: 101). It thus fails to explore how an individual’s unique subjectivities, for example, their fears, anxieties, insecurities, motivations, desires and painful realities, can influence what they say, or avoid saying, as much as society's discursive regimes. This chapter therefore builds on Chapter 4 by providing a psychosocially literate understanding of three male victims of domestic abuse. This approach looks for the biographically nuanced motivations and desires, or the ‘emotional truth’ (Jefferson, 1997b: 281) that is often signposted by the discursive contradictions and navigations an individual makes. I start by briefly outlining the work of Tony Jefferson, Wendy Hollway and David Gadd, pioneers of the psychosocial interpretative methodology in criminology. With their work in mind, I explore the ‘inner worlds’ (Jefferson, 2002: 63) and their relation to the outer worlds of Jim, Ean and Gary. In turn, I provide a ‘pen portrait’, or summary of their individual stories, followed by an analysis of their accounts. This process reveals the relationship between masculinity and abuse for men who have experienced abuse to be complex, as Jim’s, Ean’s and Gary’s intimate relationships were negotiated
alongside class and culturally prescribed feelings of unmet masculine expectation and failure. Furthermore, it illustrated how the incoherence and contradiction that undermined the plausibility of the men’s accounts signposted their attempts to guard against painful realities: for Jim, the struggle with his sexuality and failure to command the loyalty of his partner; for Ean, the failure to negotiate a disciplined, protective, loving relationship and the realisation that if his actions were abusive, so too were his father’s; and for Gary the reality that he had harmed one partner in a ‘mental’ rage as a result of her infidelity and had failed to inspire the loyalty of another partner that his masculine expectation prescribed.

A psychosocial approach

Tony Jefferson’s dissatisfaction with reductionist theories of male power, control, oppression and violence, led him to consider the importance of men’s subjectivities and the complex relations men have with hegemonic masculinity (Jefferson, 2008). This shift in thinking for Jefferson meant that, as well as a social understanding, social scientists should not overlook an individual’s psyche, or ‘inner world’ (Jefferson, 2002: 63). Thus he adopted a psychosocial approach in his analysis of secondary biographical and media data on the boxer Mike Tyson. In this work titled Tougher than the rest: Mike Tyson and the destructive desires of masculinity (1996), Jefferson looked at the idea that individuals defend themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, against feelings of anxiety through identification with certain discursive positions. Jefferson suggested that Tyson’s investment in a ‘super stud’ discourse and his ‘ultra-macho’ promiscuity and objectification of women served to protect him from his fear that women were only interested in him because of his fame (Jefferson, 1996: 100).

It was following on from his work on Tyson that Jefferson, along with Wendy Hollway, developed The Free Association Narrative Interview method (FANI) (2000), adopted in this thesis (see methodological account in Chapter 2). Taking inspiration from German sociological research that elicited rich biographical accounts from understandably defensive Second World War holocaust survivors
and Nazi service personnel (Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992; Schutze, 1992), Hollway’s and Jefferson’s FANI method was designed specifically to achieve similarly fruitful results in terms of data with other guarded individuals. Recognising that inconsistencies, and ‘freely’ made associations, often signposted the routes to unconscious feelings and motivations that would otherwise remain hidden, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) interpreted the accounts of men and women living on ‘high’ and ‘low-crime’ estates about their fear of crime. Dispensing with the idea that an individual’s fearfulness of crime related only to what they knew about their risk of victimisation, Hollway’s and Jefferson’s work acknowledged the relevance of subjectivity, encouraging individuals to convey the unique complexity of their relationship with fear. They found, for example, that one man who they interviewed, called Hassan, was irrationally afraid of victimisation, despite living in secure purpose built accommodation for the elderly. From his account, Hollway and Jefferson concluded that Hassan’s fear of being killed as a result of racial hatred was unconsciously connected to the ‘self-hate, denial and regret’ he experienced as a result of his wife leaving him (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 8). However, when Jefferson, along with Gadd, later returned to consider the earlier conclusions drawn about Hassan’s irrational fears, it was acknowledged that Jefferson’s ‘own conscious investments in a strong and stoical masculinity’ had at the time made it difficult for him to identify with Hassan’s fearfulness (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007: 66), illustrating clearly the value of fully considering the inter-subjectivities that exist between interviewer and interviewee. The value of the FANI as a research method capable of eliciting guarded accounts was evidenced by Gadd and colleagues’ (2002) interviews with twenty two men, a year after they had indicated in the Scottish Crime Survey 2000 that they had been victimised by their partner. Gadd et al (2002) found that whilst some men simply admitted that they were in fact perpetrators, others’ stories were complex, contradictory and open to re-interpretation. For example, acts they framed as defensive, such as holding their partner down, or putting their hands round their partner’s neck, could be reconstructed as acts likely to have been perceived by their female partners as life-threatening. As a result of the information provided by the men, the ‘victim’
status of thirteen of them had to be redefined as ‘retaliator’, ‘equal combatant’ or even in one case as ‘primary instigator’ (Gadd et al, 2002: 38).

More recently Gadd and colleagues, for Phase 3 of the From Boys to Men project, carried out life history interviews with 30 young men, aged 16-21, who had experienced domestic violence whether as witnesses, victims, or perpetrators (Gadd et al, 2014). Following on from the project report that offered a thematic overview of the men’s experiences, Gadd et al (2014) carried out a more interpretive analysis of the account of one young man, Spencer, a twenty year old white British man who regarded himself as both a victim and perpetrator. As Gadd et al (2014) point out Spencer’s story of his abusive relationship was typical of many men’s in which a limited understanding of how to navigate issues of trust, disagreement and unrealistic expectations of women was relevant (Gadd et al, 2015). Their psychosocially literate interpretation of Spencer’s account revealed that his dependency upon his partner, a woman prostituting herself to fund her drug addiction was, for him, a reality too painful to confront.

In what follows, I adopt a similar approach to interpreting the accounts of three male victims of domestic victimisation, Jim, Ean and Gary.

**Jim’s pen portrait**

Jim was my first interviewee, a fifty two year old white British man, presenting as a victim of domestic abuse. I had made contact with Jim through a support worker for male victims of domestic abuse, who provided me with his telephone details and informed me that Jim was very keen to talk about his experiences. I telephoned Jim and we arranged to meet at a museum near to his home, at which I had rented an office for the duration of the interview. At first glance I was struck by Jim’s size. Despite his slightly hunched reliance upon a walking stick, I felt sure that in his youth Jim would have appeared tall and solid, no doubt physically formidable in his early adulthood. Jim’s face was soft and friendly, with an ageless quality that transcends generations. I imagined he would have been an attractive child and a striking man in his prime, now more than half way through a century,
he had more wrinkles than his age, tell-tale signs of the life that he would describe to me, a life blighted with physical and emotional pain. As I shall show, the pain that marked Jim's life story with chronic illness, alcohol addiction and depression had culminated in a number of suicide attempts and periods of self-harm. Jim made it clear to me that he had never entered the museum and the experience was clearly alien to him. The office walls were shelved on three sides, full from floor to ceiling with old books. I was sensitive to the fact that, whilst as an academic I felt at home in this space, Jim as a working class man, who had left school at fourteen to join the merchant navy, felt uncomfortable. I worked hard to put Jim at ease through friendly chit chat prior to the interview, but it quickly became apparent that he had a story that he was eager to tell, so the recorder was started. It did not take long to establish that although Jim had little by way of formal education, highlighted at times by his poor grammar, he was a clever and articulate man, whose biographical account was detailed and descriptive. Jim made my job easy. He had plenty he wanted to say so there was little need to prompt, apart from the obligatory mmmm, yeah and nods, as confirmation that I was listening and interested.

Jim's experiences growing up

Jim was a working class man who had grown up in a fishing community during the 1950s and 1960s. He explained: 'we were backstreet kids, we were not the posh end, the respectable like' and the toughness of the time and the people living it resonated throughout his account. Jim stated that his 'mam' would say that his father had 'changed when he came back from the war, he was never the same'. Whilst his mother may have had memories of a more gentle man, Jim had no recollection of his dad being anything other than an 'evil, nasty 'drinker':

... A violent man me dad, very violent, he had a big thick belt with a massive buckle on it and we got that regular, well the boys did.

By Jim's account so did his 'mam':
He was aggressive towards mum. He didn’t hit her very often, but when he did, he hit her.

Of the ten men that I interviewed, Jim was the only one who spoke of the abuse of women being common place within the community and how his mother had been no exception:

He would come home and knock her round, slap her round. You see it so often and I was in friends’ houses and blokes were doing it and you just thought that’s what you do.

He spoke of the men he had grown up around, saying that if they were not away at sea fishing, they were in the pub and when they did eventually return home it was to routinely beat their wives. This was ‘awful’, but Jim had resigned himself to the fact that ‘that was what was done’. Witnessing his mum’s suffering was not Jim’s only experience of abuse as a child. During his interview, Jim revealed that between the ages of five and seven he was repeatedly raped by his older sister’s husband. He first disclosed this experience very early on in his initial interview. He recalled that, ‘mam and dad didn’t believe that my abuser was my sister’s husband’ and ‘I was just beaten and then cast off to this elderly lady who looked after me for six years’. Having made this brief account of his experience, Jim was quick to interject ‘well, that’s another story down the road’. However, later into the interview, Jim made the same revelation again, as if he had not already done so earlier, stating ‘I should tell you’:

I was abused as a child and penetration did happen, um with a knife to my throat, on more than one occasion.

Jim’s account of the act itself was short and succinct in this first interview, perhaps indicative of his need to just get the recollection over with. His account during his second interview, in response to my directly asking him to speak more about it, was much more detailed:

I am sorry but I really don’t remember and I have tried to remember but the actual age it started, I know I was young,
whether I was between five or seven. I can’t remember the actual age. I just remember an occasion, he was a fisherman and he would come home from sea.... I just remember this cold piece of steel round my neck and err he was saying “don’t move!” and err his hands started erm moving about, touching me and other things. I don’t know what he opened, but he opened something and put it round my backside (Jim sniffs audibly) and the rest is history, isn’t it? He just sodomised me.

The pain that Jim felt was tangible during his account. His voice was quiet and subdued, yet his ‘sniff’ seemed a deliberate gesture of resilience. As an adult he had broached the subject of the abuse he had experienced with his ex-wife:

I did tell her and she said, “oh it was the norm of the day. You know so and so’s husband tried it on with her and we just kept our legs crossed and guarded us tight…well it happens all the time”.

Jim was uncertain about his ex-wife’s victim blaming presentation of sexual abuse as something that ‘happens all the time’, unless you guard yourself ‘tight’, stating:

“No it doesn’t”, but it did, it did.

Unfortunately for Jim, his experience of disempowerment was further compounded by the reaction of his parents when he found the strength to tell them he was being abused. Rather than accepting Jim’s story, his father beat him and he was ‘cast out’ with what he described as a ‘gagging order’. Hence, the ultimate powerlessness came with the subsequent abandonment by his parents and their failure to acknowledge his suffering:

I was cast out and in them days just cast out. They didn't want the indignity of it all at that age, but to me it was wrong and you just cover yourself with guilt and then I think you put it deep in the back of your head. It's just a nightmare that pops up now and again.

Jim’s account revealed that as a young man he had struggled with his sexuality. He described having an intimate relationship with another man:
...I had a friend and yeah he tried to, never ever tried to penetrate me or anything like that, he was a friend and he was gay. I mean he was really gay...there was no sex, at all, masturbation yeah, but no actual sex and there was no kissing, but there was cuddling and a friendship bond.

Jim also told me about a reunion he had with the man years later:

We had a banter and then we just shook hands and no we didn’t, we cuddled actually, yeah I think it was respect for each other. I think he chose his path and I think mine was the other way.

Jim was keen for me to know that his ‘friend’ was different to him, as ‘he was really gay’. Jim stated that, for him, straight after this intimate encounter:

... The macho kicked in, the macho definitely kicked in.

For Jim, this was a turning point in his life, whereby he started to emulate the example of masculinity that he had experienced growing up. He described himself as a ‘stud’ and told me how he had ‘tagged in with the lads’, by gaining sexual expertise from Shirley Jones (anonymised), who he said had sexually ‘broke’ them ‘all in’ (meaning the local lads) and taught them all ‘the bits and bobs’. Jim recalled the work ethic that his Uncle (the lodger not a real uncle) had taught him, stating:

“When you got these”, obviously my hands he said “you’ll never need for anything’ he said ‘you’ll always get by”.

Jim’s working history consisted of a string of manual, traditionally male dominated jobs; in the merchant navy, on the docks, on oil rigs and finally as a publican. He recalled with relish how he could handle himself physically and had endured getting ‘stabbed’, having ‘shotguns’ to his ‘head’, ‘matches’ to his ‘throat’ and being ‘shot at’, violence he presented as expected within the environments he had chosen.

Jim’s desire to be the earner was evidenced by the fact that, despite caring for his two young children by his first marriage for over a year, he handed them back to
their mother so that he could work, because he stated a solicitor:

…convinced me that it was better that I worked, give her the kids and go to work, and I did.

Jim, not wanting to appear sexist, stated:

I wasn’t one of these that believes that women do all the housework, if a woman wants to work then fine.

However, his traditional view of the male role was still evident in his account:

That’s okay, as long as the kids are okay, as long as it works between everybody. But if that means that the female gets the job and the kids suffer and I got a job, that’s wrong.

**Jim’s adult experiences of domestic abuse**

Jim revealed that he had been married four times, during which he had fathered three children (two by his first wife and one by his third) and had also fathered a fourth child with a woman whom he never married. Despite the numerous relationships he spoke of, Jim made his agenda for our meeting very clear. He wanted to speak of his victimisation by his fourth wife, Karen. He spoke of her threatening him with a hammer, the ‘constant barrage of belittling, pulling me down, dragging me down’ and the ‘pure terror’. Jim had suffered periods of depression throughout his life and he described still being in ‘deep depression’ when he met Karen, but he recalls that when he had divorced his previous wife she ‘… just came over… and befriended me’. Jim described what he saw as the ‘turning point’ in their relationship. After his breakdown he had been attending a mental health support group. One week partners were also invited to attend the group meeting. Jim recalls how he had anticipated Karen providing her support at the meeting, however:

Karen came up and she said, “he’s just a really horrible bastard” and everybody looked and she said, “he’s just evil and nasty in his
depression”… They said, “is he violent?” “Oh no, he’s never violent. He doesn’t hit me, but he’s nasty with his mouth”.

Jim relayed the years that followed as ones during which, ‘some aggression came verbally and there were words’ and he recalled feeling that he was on the ‘scrap heap’. He described how after sex he felt put down, as that is when his wife’s ‘bad mouthing’ would start. He described feeling ‘trapped’ in their home because ‘she picked the awkward house’ for his level of disability. He recalled how ‘It was a physical trap, I was sort of tied. I was afraid to go anywhere’. In fact, Jim’s account of this period of his life was one of becoming even more depressed. Jim recalled trying to ‘blank’ this period by ‘stuffing’ tablets down his throat, but he speaks of the ‘shock’ he felt when Karen moved to a new house without him:

Shock was an understatement… I just remembered getting off me chair and lining all my tablets up and four pints of water and I took over a hundred and I mean today I can say fortunately - at the time I didn’t. I said unfortunately, she came back.

Despite Karen telling the ambulance staff to:

“Let the bastard die. He’s a horrible person. He knocks me about. He kicks the shit out of me. Let him die!”

Karen allowed Jim to move back in with her whilst he recovered from his suicide attempt. However, Jim depicted Karen as his abusive jailor, who had deliberately imprisoned him in her home:

I was just locked in this bedroom, not literally locked in, but I was only allowed to be in this bedroom.

This, however, was not the full story for Jim, later he admitted that he had put the lock on the door himself. Within a week of allowing him to stay Jim said that Karen had wanted him to leave and that is when ‘it all kicked off’. Jim relayed to me that he had experienced ‘pure terror’ as a result of the threats that Karen had made to him. When asked about the kind of threats she made, Jim said that she would threaten to ‘douse all the food with sleeping powder’, or threaten to get ‘all the
badduns in Sheffield' to deal with him. Jim recounted that during this period he also made ‘seven or nine’ calls to the police. He described one incident which resulted in a police response:

…this particular day she’d threatened me with a hammer. I just rung the police and with that she legged it out of the house.

Jim also spoke of having experienced abuse during his third marriage. He depicted acts of violence by his ex-wife, Sal, as the ‘funny’ antics of a hysterical woman, whom he suggested was suffering from ‘PMT’ (pre-menstrual tension):

She went and got a big spanner for the barrels and gas and she whacked me across the back of the head with that (laughs).

And:

She knocked me out with a cabbage. Sounds funny

And:

…though she had leathered the crap out of me and I was covered from head to toe with Bakelite. I just seem to recall being on the floor and I just looked up and she just had the telephone cable in her hand and I went “Where’s the phone?” She went “In your f-ing head” (laughs) and I just laughed.

I decided to ask Jim why he thought he was more frightened of Karen than Sal, to which he answered:

Sal never put me anywhere where I didn’t belong. I, to me I never belonged on a pedestal because that’s the way I was told as a kid, you know. You are what you are. You’re a bloke. You get work and you bring the money in for the kids.

But with Karen he:

…just looked at this woman as somebody that put me on a pedestal. I never really saw her chipping away at the bottom of it
and knocking me down.

Whilst Jim had spoken of attacks on him, his account also revealed how, if 'provoked', he could lose control. He spoke of having caught his first wife in bed with another man, stating:

Well he went through a window, and I put her outside naked.

Jim also spoke of how his wife Karen had levied accusations at him saying: “he knocks me about. He kicks the shit out of me”. He also described having been arrested after she accused him of having:

...punched her, bodily grabbed her and threw her around the room.

Jim insisted he was not charged with these offences and refuted the allegations. Despite his admission that he would punch holes in walls and doors, even ripping a door off its hinges in the presence of one wife, Jim still contended that he ‘... just wasn’t a violent person’. Jim did not acknowledge any level of culpability, but when I asked Jim directly whether any of his partners thought that he was going to hit them, he answered:

Yeah, yeah, but it was only in arguments.

**Analysis**

Jim’s account was one which contained four dominant somewhat contrived sounding themes which I address in turn: (1) *The working class man*; (2) *The macho stud*; (3) *The ‘funny’ side of abuse*; (4) *The abused ‘big bloke’*. In what follows I suggest that Jim struggled to negotiate his adult intimate relationships and that these discourses protected him from the feelings of failure he felt about them.
**The working class man**

Whilst there is no doubting Jim’s experience of victimisation was significant, what was striking about his description of the 1950’s and 1960’s working class fishing community in which he had grown up, was just how void of any positive memories it was. He had made no stereotypical nostalgic recollections of working class Britain. The freedom to play out in the street for all hours, the families who all knew and looked out for each other and the strong sense of community, despite the poverty, were not present in Jim’s reflections. Instead, Jim’s narrative emphasised his experience of strong, silent, brutal and emotionally distant masculinity. He had talked about how the men in his community, as fishermen, were away from their families for long periods at sea. He said that when they returned to shore, they would spend most of their time and wages in the pub. Jim described how the men would beat their wives when they did eventually return home drunk. He had spoken of witnessing his own father ‘knock’ his mother ‘round’ and had seen how ‘blokes were doing it’ to his friends’ mums too. He revealed his understanding that as a man you ‘never’ belong ‘on a pedestal’, your function is purely breadwinning, ‘you get work and you bring the money in for the kids’, ‘that’s what you do’.

Punctuating Jim’s description of the environment in which he had grown up was his revelation of sexual abuse by his sister’s husband. He had described how when he had confided in his parents, his father had beaten him and he had been ‘cast out’ to live with an elderly women and her lodger, people whom he came to call ‘aunty’ and ‘uncle’. Jim described the pressure not to bring shame on the family by speaking of his abuse, as a ‘gagging order’. This ‘gagging’ had clearly compounded his feelings of disempowerment, but he had dealt with it by positioning himself as an exclusive product of 50’s/60’s working class culture. By focussing his account on the strong, silent and emotionally detached men he had grown up around, Jim was able to justify his own silence and emotional detachment as acting like a man. Jim’s story of confiding in his ex-wife many years later and her belittling his experience as something that ‘happens all the time’, further explained his silence, by compounding the notion that he was not
harbouring a shameful secret, so much as an un-extraordinary incident of the era, hardly worth mentioning.

The macho stud

As a young man, Jim became the ‘macho’ ‘stud’. Jim had recalled the point in his youth at which he aligned himself with a stereotypical representation of masculinity, when he said that the ‘macho’ had ‘definitely kicked in’. He described how he had ‘tagged in with the lads’, by gaining sexual expertise from a sexually experienced local girl, who he recalled had ‘broke’ them ‘all in’ by teaching them all ‘the bits a bobs’. Despite Jim being keen during his first interview to portray himself as the same as the other ‘lads’, he had revealed during his second interview that as a young man he had a sexual relationship with another man. Jim had insisted this experience involved ‘no sex’, or ‘no actual sex’, despite his admitting to mutual ‘masturbation’ and stating, with uncertainty, that his friend had ‘tried to, never tried to penetrate’ him. This man Jim differentiated himself from as he was ‘really gay’.

Hence, underlying Jim’s self-portrayal of hegemonic masculinity was his struggle with heterosexual intimacy. Despite describing himself as a ‘stud’, Jim had spoken of being criticised for his sexual performance by his wife Karen. I had noted Jim’s description of their sex was very mechanical. He spoke of having to put himself through ‘whatever she had to do’, whilst he was not able to ‘do anything at all’ and only when she was ready, being allowed to do what he wanted to do all along. I had considered whether, for Jim, intimacy with women had ever been anything other than his just going through the motions. By contrast, Jim’s description of the ‘cuddling’ and the ‘bond’ he had with the ‘really gay’ man had revealed a closeness and intimacy that his heterosexual accounts were void of. Jim’s uncertainty regarding his heterosexuality became more evident when he explained that the man he had been intimate with ‘chose his path’, but went on, ‘I think mine was the other way’, the ‘think’ suggesting that he was not entirely sure he had gone down the ‘right’ path for him. It was against this backdrop of abuse, ‘macho’ performance and sexual uncertainty, that Jim forged his relationships with women.
His accounts of two such relationships revealed two distinct themes - *The ‘funny’ side of abuse and the abused man*.

**The ‘funny’ side of abuse**

Surrounding Jim’s account of his third marriage to Sal was another less than convincing account of ‘funny’ domestic abuse. He spoke of being a publican, un-phased by the dealers and gangsters who frequented his pub. He had ‘bigged up’ his toughness, bragging that he had endured being ‘stabbed’, having ‘shotguns’ to his ‘head’, ‘matches’ to his ‘throat’ and being ‘shot at’. He described being similarly un-phased by the violent outbursts of his hysterical pre-menstrual wife, Sal. Much like the boys Barter and McCary (2009) had spoken to (see page 33), who described their female partner’s use of violence as ‘funny’ and having ‘no impact’, Jim laughed off the conflict, also speaking of her hitting him over the head with a ‘spanner’, ‘a cabbage’ and a ‘phone’, as ‘funny’. Rather than accept Jim’s story of a man unbothered by his third wife Sal’s abuse, a more insightful interpretation of Jim’s account of the marriage must acknowledge the struggle that he faced with regards to his sexuality. Jim’s inability to feel the same ‘respect’ and closeness with women that he had described experiencing with another man, must have led to feelings of failure and disappointment and isolation. Jim’s masculine bravado of laughing off the abuse by a hormonal woman positioned him as untouchable and unhurt physically. It also denied the possibility that such abuse concealed an emotional pain.

**The abused ‘big bloke’**

Jim’s account of his experience of abuse during his fourth marriage to Karen was a stark contrast to how he had spoken of the abuse within his third marriage to Sal. By the time Jim married Karen, he was consumed with alcoholism, depression and on ‘the scrap heap’. Jim described how rather than looking after him when he needed her help and support, Karen had abused him. He described the
‘degrading’ ‘domestic abuse’, the ‘constant barrage of belittling, pulling me down, dragging me down’. He had told me that he had felt ‘pure terror’, as a result of ‘general threats of violence’ from this woman he portrayed as mad. He had described her threats to ‘douse all the food with sleeping powder’, to get ‘all the badduns in Sheffield’ to deal with him and to hit him with ‘a hammer’. Whilst Jim had spoken of feeling ‘weak’, ‘vulnerable’ and victimised, Karen had made accusations that Jim was ‘a really horrible bastard’, who knocked her about. This opinion was supported by the police who had noted when they were called out to incidents of conflict that Jim, like his father before him, was a ‘fucking big bloke’. Jim had recalled his mother’s care of his alcoholic father until she died, despite his abuse of her. Whether or not Karen’s accusations of Jim’s violence were true, he expected the same loyalty. Jim’s contrived revelation that he had been imprisoned by Karen in a bedroom in her house, when it was he who had locked himself in the room, was arguably a vain attempt to coercively illicit the care that he believed a wife should provide. This manoeuvre by Jim would have resulted in the kind of confused power play in his relationship that Donovan and Hester (2015) had identified in their cohort (pp46-47). The ‘practices of love’ that serve to confuse the recognition of domestic abuse and expectations about gender that they identified (Donovan & Hester, 2015: 22) are also evident here. Jim’s neediness, though emasculating to him, placed the burden of finding emotional strength on Karen, who provided care amidst a relationship in which the desire for power and the avoidance of feelings of powerlessness were often in play. When locking himself in a bedroom in Karen’s house had failed to ensure that she met his needs, Jim positioned himself as the victim of an abusive mad woman rather than concede that he had failed to command the loyalty he expected from his wife, however troubled their relationship.

Ean’s pen portrait

Ean was a twenty five year old Chinese Malaysian man, who had made contact with me as a result of an advert for male research participants with experience of domestic abuse. I interviewed him in an office at the university. He struck me as
being very much younger than his years and he came across as just a teenager. He was nevertheless intelligent and educated, having studied maths at Masters level, his intention being at some point to do a PhD. He had been in the UK studying for two years when we met, but planned to return to Malaysia to start a lecturing job. I was struck by his pristine appearance. He wore a crisp, white, open collar shirt, with a navy cashmere jumper, smart jeans and classic wool navy overcoat. His appearance was noteworthy, as it was an upper middle class statement that would not have been out of place on London’s King’s Road. Whilst Ean’s very British attire made me forget for a moment our different nationalities, his interview very quickly revealed a culturally distinct perception of abuse.

**Ean’s experiences growing up**

Ean had spent his formative years in Malaysia, growing up alongside a younger brother and sister whom he said little about, except that they had partners with whom they were ‘… getting on very well’. Ean’s was a traditionally extended family and he grew up having a close relationship with both parents and grandparents, a family that he described as peaceful, ‘very stable’, stating:

… in fact, I think because of my upbringing in this family, I don’t usually see the blemishes, the blemish. Yeah, the difficult things that happen in other families.

Whilst Ean had spoken of his grandfather as being a ‘caring’ man, he acknowledged that his mother had disclosed to him that he could frequently get ‘angry’ and ‘quite violent’ when ‘people were not listening to him’. When I asked Ean how his grandfather had been violent, he said:

He was simply like, er, overturning the table because he was angry, people were not listening to him or people were quarrelling… He wasn’t really violent towards anyone and he wasn’t really hurting people. He was a very caring grandfather.
Ean also revealed his schoolteacher father as a disciplinarian who would ‘beat’ him with a ‘stick’ when he was ‘naughty’, such as when he ‘didn’t do’ his ‘homework well’. Ean framed his father’s actions as ‘reasonable chastisement’ and those of a loving father trying to ‘teach’ him a ‘lesson’. However, Ean recalled one incident when he was ‘five or six’, when he had pestered his father in a supermarket to buy him a toy. Ean described how his father had become really angry and when they got home, he had hit him across the ‘hips’ with a ruler so hard that it broke:

So I was really terrified. Maybe he wasn’t really angry, he was just trying to give me a lesson, but because the ruler broke and I was terrified, so I thought... that’s not really... fair... That was the particular instant that I felt it was unreasonable, because I just wanted to buy a toy.

Ean recalled another incident of ‘discipline’ by his father:

...One instance I remember, it was during recess time, when I was in standard one, erm, my father told me that I shouldn’t play during recess time. I mean run around chasing each other, things like that... Because my father was a teacher, he was a secondary school teacher, so he was very strict about this discipline and things, so he asked me not to play during recess time but that Friday, because the recess time was half an hour earlier than usual, my father forgot about that. So he didn't show up when recess started, so I thought it was a time for me, a chance for me to play with my friends, my classmates and then, when erm, when the recess time ended, I was drenched. And then my father came, because he thought it was, he had remembered the role time, so he'd brought some food to me, so he wanted to pass the food on to me, and then when he saw me drenched, he was, he was really angry and so when I got home, he hit me very hard.
In fact, this incident involved a ‘smacking’ that Ean admitted had ‘probably’ left him ‘marked’. Ean maintained that this kind of physical ‘beating’ was normal within Malaysian families when he was a growing up.

**Ean’s adult experiences of domestic abuse**

Ean revealed that nearly a year before being interviewed, he had split with his girlfriend, who was also a student and two years younger than him. He spoke to me of having met his girlfriend at Church, although they didn’t actually talk for about a year. He said that they then started to ‘date’. Ean described her as ‘very quiet…quite soft spoken’. He said that she had also experienced being beaten by her parents, but that it was ‘not very serious’. Ean spoke of their relationship being ‘okay’ at first, but then she ‘began to manifest her abusive nature’ three months in, revealing herself to be ‘mentally sick’. He described how, one rainy afternoon, he had hit her ‘unintentionally,’ whilst trying to open an umbrella. This resulted in her being ‘very angry’ and him being ‘disappointed’ with the way that she had reacted. He described how they had argued. He said that they went to McDonalds for ice-cream, but she did not speak to him. Ean told me how he tried to, ‘explain to her why, why the way she reacted was not right’. They had returned to his flat, still arguing and he described how she had wanted ‘to run away’. However, he had felt that as it was a long way home for her, it was not actually ‘feasible’ that she left alone, so he ‘tried to restrain her’, which he achieved ‘by holding her’. He spoke of how he was afraid that she may harm herself, as in the past she had done some ‘scary things’ like threaten to commit suicide. Whilst restraining her, he told me that she bit his hand, which caused him to let go and:

> She ran away. It was a slopey place and then when I start to corner her, I didn’t want her to go any further. I just started to corner her. When she was unable to progress, she started to throw stones at me, which was very hurtful to me at that time. I was really shocked that she could do such a thing.
Ean said that although the incident had made him believe that she was ‘psychologically sick’ he was not fearful for himself, just concerned for her safety. Ean described another incident whereby he ‘went to grab her’ following an argument they had been having in bed:

She just got up and walked towards the window and opened up the window in a slow motion. So when I saw it, my response, my instant response was to want to grab her.

Ean said that on this occasion he had restrained her for ‘about 20 minutes’, as he was afraid that she would jump out of the window. Ean also spoke of how, during their relationship, she would insult him, call him a ‘liar’ and ‘very abusive names’ that he could not ‘quite remember’ but which meant ‘something like a hooligan’. He described her being very demanding on his time wanting ‘100% attention’ and that she did not like him to go out with his friends. He also spoke of how she did not want him to spend too much time at school and how she gave him ‘a time slot’ to visit his family. He described how he ‘tried to abide’ by her restrictions:

She sometimes made it like two months before I could visit my family and only for about two days, so I thought my life was controlled.

This was an experience that Ean said had caused him ‘a lot of hurt and psychological difficulties’. Ean said he had tried to ‘hold onto everything’ to prevent the breakdown of what was a ‘very tiring psychologically’, ‘torturing’ relationship. When I asked Ean whether he thought she had considered him to be abusive towards her, he admitted that by ‘trying to have control on her’, she had:

Yeah, she did erm, think that I was abusive towards her. Like, for example, I always tried to restrain her from running away from house, from the house, I mean in the middle of the night when we quarrel so erm, so when I tried to restrain her by holding her, she thought I was abusive because I was holding too tight, which I must admit I probably did hold her too tight, not wanting to let her go.
And:

I really love her and I was afraid for her to run away so was, in a sense, I was quite controlling.

When asked if he had ever hurt her physically whilst restraining her he stated:

I don’t rule out that possibility but I am very sure that I didn’t erm, hurt her physically. I was just trying to restrain her from running away and doing things like that.

Despite saying that his ex-girlfriend did feel abused by his actions, he insisted that she had liked him doing so:

I mean many times when she told me that, she actually felt happy when I restrained her, because that showed that I really er, loved her and wanted to, to salvage the relationship maybe?

As the relationship drew to a close Ean proposed that they only made contact with each other on Wednesdays and Saturdays for a two month period, to enable him to ‘prepare’ for the ‘random’ and ‘time consuming’ arguments that he anticipated. Whilst he recognised that she was not happy with the arrangement, she still went along with it. He spoke of how eventually he had tried to contact her, but that he was ‘ignored’, so eventually he ‘gave up’. Ean acknowledged that the relationship ‘couldn’t work out’ because at least one of them had a problem:

I just want to understand… whether I was, I had problems myself that I really need to deal with and also, I think, I personally think that she was quite mentally sick… I always wanted to help and I was thinking that if there was any help that I could offer her.

However, ultimately Ean believed that the problem was with his ex-girlfriend:

…I think, I personally think that she was quite mentally sick.

Ean felt that his ex-girlfriend’s psychological problems were confirmed by the fact that he did not need to change in any way with his new girlfriend, as she ‘tries to
improve herself’ when they had argued. Although Ean questioned why he had stayed in an abusive relationship for so long, suggesting maybe it was his ‘pride’, he said that he continued to ‘miss’ his ex-girlfriend a lot.

Analysis

Three dominant themes stood out in Ean’s story, which I address in turn: (1) A ‘blemish free’ upbringing; (2) A ‘terrified’ child; (3) Protecting a ‘mentally sick’ woman. In what follows I suggest that by framing his partner as ‘mentally sick’, Ean guarded himself from certain realisations: first, that he had failed to meet with his expectations of what men do, to sustain loyal relationships through discipline, protection and love; secondly, that his own actions, as well as his ‘blemish free’ upbringing, could be framed as abusive.

A ‘blemish free’ upbringing

A dominant narrative of Ean’s story was his portrayal of his family as ‘very stable’. He spoke of a ‘blemish free’ family unlike other families who experienced the ‘difficult things that happen’. Ean had described his grandfather as a ‘caring’ man and his parents as ‘very loving’. He had recalled an incident of ‘very strict’ ‘discipline’, whereby he was ‘hit’ ‘very hard’ for ignoring his father’s rule not to play outside with the other children during ‘recess’. This incident was presented as a ‘lesson’ by a father who ‘loved’ him and wanted to protect him from getting ‘drenched and tired, exhausted’ and unable to ‘focus in class’. His upbringing was therefore ‘blemish free’, only to the extent that the physical chastisement was deemed by him to be reasonable and for his own good.

A ‘terrified’ child

By contrast, Ean also spoke of his grandfather as an ‘angry’ man who often lost his ‘temper’ and, according to Ean’s mother, could become ‘quite violent' when
‘people did not listen to him’. Ean’s depiction of his parents was similarly confusing. His presentation of a ‘loving’, though disciplined, upbringing, was interjected with memories of an ‘angry’ authoritarian father, who at times had ‘hit’ him so hard he had been ‘marked’. Ean described these incidents as ‘not really fair’ and causing him to feel ‘terrified’. It was against this backdrop of a loving, though disciplined/terrifying and unfair upbringing, that Ean appraised his adult intimate relationships.

**Protecting a ‘psychologically sick’ woman**

Ean had spoken of the ‘very tiring psychologically’, even ‘torturing’, abuse he had experienced from his partner; these feelings of victimisation resulting from her preventing him from working, stopping him from visiting his parents, name calling, a bite and a single incident whereby she had thrown stones at him. However, his story had also revealed that his attempts to restrain her, along with his oppressive schedule of contact once the relationship was reaching its conclusion, could match his partner’s levels of control. However, Ean had framed his own actions of holding and restraining as acts born out of a duty to protect a vulnerable woman. He portrayed himself as the calm and stabilising force within their relationship, painting his partner as hysterical, unpredictable and ‘psychologically sick’.

Despite his acknowledgement that she had felt that he was ‘abusive towards her’ because he had held her ‘too tight not wanting to let her go’, Ean had claimed that his girlfriend was made ‘happy’ about his actions of restraint and she felt ‘loved’.

Ean’s and his partner’s relationship could simply be read as one that involved ‘mutual fighting’, or even ‘common couple’ conflicts, involving reciprocal aggression that became more frequent as the relationship drew to an end. However, read more interpretatively, one cannot ignore what Ean’s story revealed about his understanding of violence and its consequences. Ean’s discourse of a ‘blemish-free’ upbringing in which his father and grandfather played disciplinary, stabilising and loving roles, contrasted his discourse surrounding the ‘angry’ grandfather and terrifying ‘unfair’ father. This was perhaps reflective of the cultural
clash between his formative years growing up in a traditional Malay household, where corporal punishment was regarded as the normal way in which fathers instil respect (Kumaraswamy & Othman, 2011) and his time spent at university in the United Kingdom (UK), where many would condemn such disciplinary chastisement as child abuse. Ean had experienced first-hand the blurred boundaries between culturally acceptable protective ‘lessons’ of love and ‘unfair’ controlling and abusive acts of anger. These boundaries must have become more confusing to Ean as he moved between the culturally acceptable norms of Malaysia and the UK.

For Ean, discipline, protection and love had become inextricably linked. At least in the UK context, Ean’s ‘holding’ behaviour could be read as the acts of a desperate man unwilling to let go of a relationship that had broken down for fear of loss and hurt ‘pride’. He had admitted that his restraint of his girlfriend was because he ‘loved her and wanted to, to salvage the relationship maybe?’, that he had held her ‘too tight’ and whilst she had bitten him to get away, he had cornered her. When she had thrown stones at him to escape, Ean had found her actions ‘very hurtful’ and shocking because he perceived himself to have been selflessly protecting her from harm. Ultimately he had conceded that she must be mad because she wanted the relationship to end. Arguably, by positioning himself as the victim of a ‘psychologically sick’ woman in need of his protection, Ean guarded himself from two more painful realisations: first, that he had failed to meet with his expectations of what men do - sustain loyal relationships through discipline, protection and love (an understanding forged by his experiences of his grandfather and father); secondly, that his own actions, as well as his ‘blemish free’ upbringing, could be framed as abusive.

**Gary’s pen portrait**

Gary was a forty three year old British man, presenting as a victim of abuse by his ‘carer’. Gary was receiving support for domestic abuse from a case worker, through whom I gained access to him. Whilst I initially felt that his story did not fit
within my partner, or ex-partner abuse remit, the interviews revealed that he had in fact had an intimate relationship with the women he called his ‘carer’ whilst they were living together. I interviewed Gary in his home which was a bungalow, suitable for his mobility problems. Upon first entering Gary’s home and meeting him, both the surroundings and his persona really grabbed my attention. His heavily tattooed biker image was complemented by the living room décor. There were lizards in a tank, skull, snake, and dagger ornaments everywhere and a pentagram wall hanging was the finishing touch to the occult theme. Like Jim, Gary’s life had been blighted with chronic alcoholism and depression which ultimately led to a nervous breakdown and uncontrollable drinking. Thirteen months before I interviewed Gary, his ‘body shut down’ and he had died three times. He had been suffering from alcohol related illnesses, ‘peripheral neuropathy and hepatic encephalopathy’, which he described as having left him unable to feel his hands and legs properly and left him as he described ‘partially brain dead’. This had resulted in Gary having to use two sticks to support himself and get around his home and a quad bike to get around outside.

**Gary’s experiences growing up**

Gary described growing up in a family of two brothers, one twelve years older and one eight years older than him and a sister who was ten years older than him. He spoke of his parents not being ‘rich’ and both having to work, his mum was a ‘cook’ and his dad was in the navy, before eventually working in security. Gary said his sister and eldest brother had gone into the army, and his youngest brother had become a mechanic. Gary said that being in the military was ‘expected of you’, but said that his poor exam results meant that he was not accepted into the army. Gary described feeling loved while growing up and spoke of his parents’ relationship as ‘strong’ and ‘very good’, stating that ‘... you wouldn’t have met two people who loved each other more’. He also recalled how his ‘strong’ mother had cared for his father, who had Parkinson’s disease, from when Gary was about eleven years old and for sixteen years prior to his death:

I took care of him with my mum for about sixteen years he had it.
Whilst Gary told me in his first interview that he could not remember his dad before he had Parkinson’s, in the second interview he spoke of a time that he had been made to feel special by his dad who at the time worked as a Chief Security officer:

I was the only kid that, everybody else had to go to the Christmas party, you know, and the Dads were driving and my Dad took me up to the gatehouse and I turned up in the fire engine… Yeah, that was the sort of Dad I had… He was a good Dad.

Despite portraying his father so positively, Gary did reveal that his dad was a ‘drinker’. He also revealed that his sister was a ‘drinker’ ‘for as long as’ he ‘can remember’ and disclosed that,tragically, ‘she did drink herself to death’ eventually. Gary had in fact suffered significant bereavement, disclosing that within a five year period he lost his sister, his youngest brother in a car crash, as well as his aunty, uncle and grandparents. Gary spoke of having bereavement counselling, which he did not feel helped and disclosed that he was still taking medication for depression. He summed his life up as having:

…always been bad with the odd good peak. Do you know what I mean? It sort of flat-lined and then beep, beep, like that sort of thing.

**Gary’s adult experiences of domestic abuse**

Gary had started the interview by telling me how he had met the lady who he referred to as his ‘carer’. He spoke of how he had known her for quite a few years, having worked with her when they were both door people at a nightclub. He informed me that her job during the day had been a nurse and he had been a mechanic. He described how after he was released from hospital having been critically ill, he had moved in with her and she had taken on the role of his ‘carer’. However, as her house was unsuitable for his mobility issues, he was rehomed in the bungalow and his ‘carer’ also moved in. Gary described early in his first interview an incident of abuse by his ‘carer’ that resulted from his asking her what
was going to be done about her incontinent cat that was becoming unmanageable in their home:

Saturday morning and I was driving along and I just merely asked her had she thought anything of what to do and she smashed me straight on the face with her fist while I was driving and nearly hit a car coming the other way. So I dropped her off at work and decided enough was enough, it was playing on my mind all day, I could have, you know, hit that car and I didn’t even know them, it scared me, and come home, she managed to get back here somehow and smashed her way in, broke my hand, broke my foot.

When I asked Gary how she had broken his hand and foot, he described how she had slammed his hand in the door and how ‘she was stamping and stamping’ on his feet, whilst he was ‘shoved up in a corner’. Gary described how she had left and how he had phoned the police, but that he hadn’t ‘got a lot of joy in them’. He said that they had wanted him to ‘press charges’, after all:

…her being a carer apparently it’s very, very serious and she was in breach of her duty of care or something.

However, Gary stated that as her brother had threatened him, he decided not pursue the matter. He also described having to call the police a second time when she had tried to break in as ‘a lot of her stuff’ was still in his house, but they did not respond on this occasion. Although Gary had described this woman as his ‘carer’, I sensed that there was in fact more to the relationship. Despite insisting during the first interview that she had moved in with him after he became ill and that he was merely her patient, he described abusive incidents that had preceded his illness. Gary told me that she had taken his ‘credit card’ whilst he was in ‘a coma’. When he discovered that she had his card he described ‘asking and asking and asking’ for it back:

It ended up in her hitting me and throwing at me in a temper. That was the first time that I thought “I’m pretty vulnerable here”.
He subsequently discovered that she had ‘emptied’ his bank account. Gary also described how she would ‘flare up quite a lot’ and would throw saucepans and ashtrays at him. When I asked him if he could ‘fend her off’, he stated that when he was ‘fit’, ‘Yeah pretty much most of the time, yeah’. When asked whether she became more aggressive when he became ill, he stated:

I think it went up a bit and I went down a bit, as in not able to defend myself as much. So it sort of… we went two separate horrible ways. I don’t think she would have punched me in the mouth before while I was driving.

Gary suggested that her knowing that he would never hit a woman made him vulnerable:

She knew damn well that one of the things that I’d always lived by is that I’d never raise a hand to a woman, even in my job. So I don’t know. Apparently she’s never assaulted any of her other patients or anything else. She just knew she could have got away with it with me. It just got too much.

Gary described how he would leave the house for a couple of hours when she became aggressive, to give her chance to ‘calm down’, after which he said that she became ‘a different person’.

Despite his claim throughout the first interview that their relationship was one of patient and carer, during his second interview I asked him if he was ever in a relationship with his ‘carer’, to which he responded:

No, we were never.

A reply I questioned by stating:

Now you’ve got a smile on your face there.

Only then did Gary reveal:
Yeah, one drunken night, we did have a fumble and stuff like that but that’s about it… it was never gonna, no, it was a drunken night and we’d been to work and I was staying at hers and one thing led to another but it was like, when I sobered up next morning it was like, no.

This incident had preceded her moving in with him, so I asked whether she was happy with his not wishing to have a relationship he said ‘no… not very’. I then asked whether this could have caused the tension between them he stated ‘Yeah, maybe, yeah’ and that she had made it ‘quite obvious’ that she would like a relationship. Despite knowing that she had feelings for him, Gary revealed to me that he had just ‘needed’ her:

I didn’t want a relationship. I just needed a carer… I was reliant on her all the time… and without… I don’t know if you’d call it going along but keeping your mouth shut, I’d have lost that.

When I asked Gary if he just let her think that they were in a relationship he replied:

Yeah, I think I might have done.

Despite the fact that Gary, by his own admission, ‘needed’ her, he described to me how her words had made him ‘shudder a bit’ when she stated:

“I never want you to get better because I know you’ll go off with somebody else”.

After moving into the bungalow with Gary as his ‘carer’, she subsequently suffered a breakdown due to him being, as he described, ‘too much for her’ and had sought the help of a psychologist. Gary revealed that she is still asking him to move back in and that she comes round still and brings him a ‘bottle’.

I asked Gary about any other relationships he had been in and he disclosed that he had been married. I asked him what that relationship had been like and he described it as being ‘nothing untoward really’. He said that they had ‘got married
for the wrong reasons’ as she had been ‘a one-night stand’ and she got pregnant. He said that as he had been ‘brought up properly’, believing that you ‘stand by’ a woman in such circumstances and that ‘there never seemed to be proper love or anything else’. When I asked whether they fought, he stated that they did not ‘fight’, but had ‘disagreements’ but ‘nothing standouty’. When asked why his marriage had ended, he spoke of it being ‘pretty similar again’, as he said that his wife had also stolen money from him. He stated that she had spent £9,000 that he had been given by his mother ‘with nothing to show for it’, after which she ‘walked out’ with their children aged six and four years old, whom he lost contact with because she ‘poisoned’ them against him. Gary described losing his mechanic business at the same time as getting a divorce, a period during which he recalled that his drinking ‘just went out of control from there’.

Gary also spoke of another relationship that he had been in before the ‘carer’. He described the woman as being ‘a bit too fiery’ and a ‘drinker’. He revealed that the relationship had at times got physical and ‘pushing and shoving was the norm’:

She was a nice size lady, but once or twice, it got to the stage of throwing things at each other and all that.

He revealed:

She had tried to stab me once (laughs).

Gary described how he had found out via the internet that she had been cheating on him and he told me ‘I went off me head… went mental’ and how he had confronted her about it:

Unfortunately I confronted her on a Sunday when we’d just finished cooking the Sunday dinner and we were washing up and all that and we got into an argument, she turned round, tried to stab me. So that didn’t work (laughs)... She didn’t manage to stab me, she cut me across all three fingers... but she didn’t get the knife where she intended (laughs)... I threw a baking tray at her to
get her off me. And I got done for assault with a baking tray. She
didn’t get done for stabbing me.

When I asked Gary if she had been injured he stated:

Yeah, apparently she had a little nick at the back of her head, bad
enough to cover.

Gary spoke of feeling the injustice when he had ‘got done for assault with a baking
tray’.

Analysis

Three dominant themes stood out in Gary’s account, which I address in turn; The
traditional and loving parents, The disbelieved victim and The abused patient. In
what follows, firstly I suggest that by framing the violent conflicts that he had with
one partner as fair fights between physically matched combatants, Gary guarded
himself against the realisation that he had attacked his unfaithful partner whilst her
back was turned. Secondly, in a subsequent relationship, by perceiving himself to
be the victim of an abusive ‘carer’, who had failed in her professional duty, he
guarded himself from the reality that he had failed to command the loyalty from a
partner that his masculine expectation prescribed.

The traditional and loving parents

Gary had described his parents as ‘traditionalist’ hard working and honest. His dad
had been in the Navy and then a security guard, his mum was a ‘cook’. He had
spoken of his childhood as ‘a ‘good’ one, during which he had felt ‘loved’ by his
parents. Gary said that his parents had ‘proper loved each other’ and ‘you wouldn’t
have met two people who loved each other more’. He had spoken of his mum
positively, reflecting on how she valued honesty, her ‘family law’ being ‘you did it,’
then ‘you own up to it’, instilling in Gary the rule that you ‘never lie on the word
honest’. Despite reluctantly admitting that his father had been a ‘drinker’, Gary’s
memories of him were equally positive. He recalled the pride that he had felt when his dad had picked him up as a boy from a children’s party in a ‘fire engine’, when everyone else’s dads just turned up in regular vehicles. Gary had described how when he was ‘elevenish’ his dad had developed Parkinson’s disease, but that even then his parents’ relationship remained ‘really strong’. Gary recalled ‘I took care of him with my mum for about sixteen years’.

It was against this backdrop of an honest traditional, for better, or for worse ethos that Gary forged his relationships with women. His accounts of those relationships reveal a sense of victimisation and injustice compounded by his unmet male expectation.

The disbelieved victim

It was because he had been ‘brought up properly’ with traditional values instilled in him that Gary decided to ‘stand by’ and marry a girl who he got pregnant on a ‘one night stand’. Gary’s regret that he had married ‘for the wrong reasons’ was clear, as he described the relationship as ‘just… going through the motions’. He said that whilst he had not felt ‘proper love’ for her and they had ‘disagreements’, there was no violence within the relationship. By contrast Gary had also spoken of a relationship in which he framed himself as the disbelieved victim of domestic violence at the hands of a woman who he had described as a ‘fiery’ ‘drinker’. Gary said that ‘pushing and shoving was the norm’ within their relationship and ‘once or twice, it got to the stage of throwing things at each other’. Gary described their ultimate conflict being when he found out that she had been cheating on him. He said that he had gone ‘off his head’ and ‘went mental’. Feelings of hurt were perhaps compounded by the fact that his girlfriend’s infidelity challenged his understanding of the ‘honest’ woman he had experienced in his mother when growing up. Gary said that he confronted her but did not elaborate how exactly his going ‘mental’ played out in that confrontation, but he did say that ‘unfortunately’ that confrontation had occurred whilst she was preparing the Sunday lunch when knives and baking trays were at hand. Whilst Gary was adamant that his girlfriend
had ‘tried to stab’ him, the fact that she had sustained an injury from a ‘baking tray’ at the ‘back of her head’ made his account somewhat implausible, no doubt contributing to his conviction for assault. However, whilst I believed that Gary’s account concealed a level of culpability, I also believed that he felt an injustice had been done. Gary had recalled that his solicitor had told him -‘You won’t win, you’re against a woman’, a gender bias that Gary perceived as particularly unfair, given the fact that he had framed the conflicts that he had with this ‘very hard’, ‘nice size’ woman as fair fights. After all, it was much better for Gary to accept that they were physically matched combatants than to concede that he had perpetrated an attack on his unfaithful partner whilst her back was turned.

**The abused patient**

Gary also spoke of his subsequent relationship being a violent one. He had described how following his release from hospital after nearly dying from alcohol related illnesses he lived with a ‘carer’. However, rather than caring for him Gary described how she would ‘flare up quite a lot’, had punched him, broken his hand and foot, thrown ‘saucelins and ashtrays at him’, taken his ‘credit card’ and spent his money. Gary spoke of feeling ‘pretty vulnerable’ and unable to ‘defend’ himself ‘as much’ as he had before becoming disabled with illness. He said that her knowing that he would ‘never raise a hand to a woman’ meant that she ‘got away with it’. Gary stated that his carer’s actions had amounted to ‘a breach of her duty of care’ making her abuse of him ‘very, very serious’. What was interesting was that when I questioned the status of their relationship, Gary had reluctantly revealed that it was not actually the professional arrangement he had presented it as. He revealed that ‘one drunken night’ before she had lived with him, they had had ‘a fumble’. He said that despite knowing that she had feelings for him he had kept his ‘mouth shut’ and had allowed her to move in with him (no doubt her thinking that their relationship was developing), as he ‘just needed a carer’. Whilst Gary’s evidence of this woman could be seen to cast doubt over his story of victimisation, a more interpretively driven understanding of Gary could provide an alternative understanding of his account. Gary had first-hand experience of a
woman committed to caring for the disabled man she loved, as he had assisted his mother in looking after his dad who had Parkinson’s disease for ‘about sixteen years’. Gary had found himself a similarly physically dependent man. Furthermore, his claim to have ‘just needed a carer’ also disclosed an emotional dependency, yet Gary found that he was unable to command the kind of loyalty he had seen his father elicit from his wife (Gary’s mum). For Gary, it was much better to accept that he was the victim of an abusive ‘carer’, who had failed in her professional duty, than to admit that he failed to command the loyalty from a partner that his masculine expectation prescribed.

Conclusion

A psychosocially literate interpretation of Jim’s, Ean’s and Gary’s accounts reveals how the men’s biographical experiences impacted upon their adult intimate relationships. It is suggested that for Jim, his performance of the ‘macho’ ‘stud’ masked the underlying struggle with his sexuality and related disappointment and failure in his heterosexual relationships. His story had also revealed how ultimately his feelings of unmet masculine expectation, that a woman should care for her man irrespective of any abuse he had inflicted on her, had resulted in him framing himself as the victim of an abusive mad woman, rather than concede that he had failed to elicit the loyalty that he expected.

It was against the backdrop of blurred boundaries between discipline protection and love/control that Ean was to manage his intimate relationship. By framing himself as a protective force and his partner as vulnerable and mad, Ean was able to guard himself against his perceived failure as a man to sustain loyal relationships through discipline, protection and love, as well as the realisation that if his actions were abusive, so too were his father’s.

Gary’s childhood had instilled in him a sense of masculine expectation. He believed that like his mother, women should be ‘honest’ and ‘strong’ in their commitment to care for their disabled men. This sense of entitlement impacted on how Gary negotiated relationships with women who did not ‘fit’ with this
understanding. By framing the violent conflicts that he had in one relationship as fair fights between physically matched combatants, Gary had guarded himself against the realisation that his partner’s infidelity had prompted his ‘mental’ attack on her. In a subsequent relationship, it was easier for Gary to accept that he was the victim of an abusive ‘carer’, who had failed in her professional duty, than the reality that unlike his father he had failed to inspire loyalty from his partner.

For all these men, the notably patriarchal ‘worlds’ in which they had watched their fathers enjoy loyal intimate relationships, bore little resemblance to the world in which they found themselves navigating intimacies. Connell recognised such ‘changes in gender relations’ both at a ‘global’ and a ‘household and personal’ level as the:

…complex changes in the conditions of practice with which men as well as women have to grapple. (Connell, 2005: 86)

No doubt Connell would recognise Jim’s, Ean’s and Gary’s failed attempts at intimacy as evidencing their struggle to ‘grapple’ such change. Unable to concede that their relationships had failed and unable to ‘let go’ they became controlling, feeling victimised when the women ‘hit back’ or tried to ‘escape’. The resulting feelings of inadequacy, isolation, unfulfilled expectation, vulnerability that they attempt to guard themselves against, along with biographically rooted pain, are thus concealed with discourses of endurance, protectionism and heroic overcoming. Ultimately, the relationship between masculinity and for men experiencing abuse is usually a complex one, marked by unresolved ‘pains’, woven between the uniquely biographical experience of failed relationships and the more general social experience of inhabiting a gendered order patterned by patriarchal expectations that are no longer so realisable. Just how complicated male victims’ relationships with abuse can be confirms the difficult task those deciding appropriate support for men presenting as victims face. The complex subjectivities evident in men’s stories highlights the importance of not dismissing their often incoherent, or contradictory accounts as untrue, but instead signposting individuals’ attempts to guard against painful realities.
Chapter 6

Limited Discursive Options: Female Perpetrators’ Stories

In chapter 4, I carried out a psycho-discursive analysis of ten male domestic abuse victims’ accounts. Similarly, this chapter provides a psycho-discursive analysis of ten female perpetrator accounts. The following questions are addressed:

1. In what ways are female perpetrators’ accounts shaped by gender?

And

2. What is the relationship between femininity and abuse for female perpetrators?

Whilst the literature surrounding women’s involvement in crime, and more specifically women’s perpetration of domestic abuse, is presented in Chapter 2, I start this chapter by recapping some of the main issues. I then provide a psycho-discursive analysis of what the female perpetrators of domestic abuse had to say about their experiences of abusiveness. This illustrates how the women negotiated their femininity alongside their experiences of victimisation and their own perpetration, thus empowering or avoiding vulnerability (Hollway, 1989) by adopting one (nine women) or more (one woman) of three discursive positions:

1. Victimised and damaged. This discourse linked childhood and adult experiences of victimisation with psychological harm. Women spoke of not being in control of their tempers, thus driven to perpetrate abuse for which they were not accountable.

2. Resilient and protective. These were accounts of resistance and survival. The women spoke about being compelled to act aggressively to protect themselves and/or their children from abuse/violence. Through this discourse women rejected images of helpless victimhood in favour of positioning themselves as agentic and resilient.
3. **Vengeful and seeking reprisal.** This was a discourse of never being victimised again without reprisal. The women spoke of choosing to be violent when emotionally hurt despite not being in danger, even if this meant victimising others. This was ‘powerful’ vengeful talk about cruel and/or deceitful men deserving of their vengeance.

I conclude the chapter by acknowledging the experiential relevance of gender for the women I spoke to (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013) and most notably its significance in terms of the way that women are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. I show how women’s uses of certain discourses reflect the combination of a limited range of options with regard to how they can depict their violence, constrained understandings of their pain as a result of ‘chronic’, ‘multi-faceted’ ‘oppression’ (Stark, 2013: 19), and their attempts to avoid shame and stigma in the contexts of domesticity, motherhood and failed and damaging intimate relationships.

**Women’s violence**

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Adler’s image of the ‘new breed of female criminal’, engaged in more aggressive and violent behaviour as a result of the ‘power’ equality has afforded her (Adler & Adler, 1975), has endured in 21st century media representations of women (Jewkes, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006). The last decade has seen headlines such as ‘**Scourge of the ladette thugs: Rising tide of violent crime committed by young women**’ (Slack, *Daily Mail*, 2009) and ‘**Violent Women: Binger Drinking Culture Fuels Rise in Attacks by Women**’ (Clout, *The Guardian*, 2008). This media coverage of ‘ladettes’, along with police arrest figures showing a significant rise in violent female offences (Hand & Dodd, 2009), has highlighted women’s violence as a problem. However, although statistics do evidence a rise in female arrests (37,100 in 1999/2000 to 88,100 in 2007/8; Hand & Dodd, 2009), linking these figures with women’s emancipation is ill founded as ‘the vast majority of women who commit crime have not been ‘liberated’- either economically or ideologically’ (Carlen, 1988: 10). Instead the rise can be attributed...
to the changes in our laws and policing practices (Steffensmeier et al, 2005) that have resulted in women who would previously have been ignored, now being labelled violent offenders (Chesney-Lind, 2006). It has been suggested that for those women who are violent, marginalisation and oppression is relevant. As recognised by Batchelor, for those women who are ‘severely constrained’ by ‘material circumstances’, engaging in violence can be a ‘positive contribution’ to ‘their sense of self and self-efficiency’ (Batchelor, 2009: 408). For some women violence is their response to ‘gender-based power inequalities’, as their experiences of emotionally detached partners fuels feelings of distrust jealousy and anger (Miller, 2008: 177). Hence, for disadvantaged women, violence becomes a means of ‘breaking out of culturally proscribed constraints and crafting their own versions of femininity and survival’ (Lopez et al, 2009: 247).

If we focus specifically on domestic abuse, as discussed in Chapter 2, the empirical evidence shows overwhelmingly that the male victim population does not experience, or live in fear of the same severe and sustained abuse as women (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Walby & Allen, 2004; Roe, 2009). Nevertheless, there is no doubting that there are men who suffer victimisation by women. So how is female perpetration of domestic abuse explained? A key explanation is that women’s violence is symptomatic of their histories of victimisation and psychological distress (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009). Some women’s violence is associated with a condition called ‘Battered Woman Syndrome’ (BWS), caused by the psychological harm that they have sustained as a result of their prolonged exposure to domestic victimisation (Walker, 1984). Hence, these women are seen as having lost their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172). The evidence overwhelmingly supports the ‘cultural authority’ (Rothenberg, 2002) that understands female perpetration as a defensive or retaliatory response to their own victimisation (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Mufic et al, 2007; Blair-Merritt, 2010). Studies show that whilst men report using violence as a form of dominance, control, or punishment, women are more likely to report having used violence to defend themselves (Hamberger et al, 1997), in an attempt to minimise their own injury (Flemke & Allen, 2008; Seamans et al, 2007; Ward & Muldoon, 2007). A recent systematic review of research confirms that whilst men are
motivated to violence by a desire to gain ‘control’, women are more likely to be motivated to violence by the need to defend themselves because they are frightened (Swan et al, 2008: 301). The wider context of women’s defensive or retaliatory violence also needs consideration. Women who act violently may not be defending themselves from a direct attack, but instead defending themselves within a context of fear stemming from past abuse they experienced from that partner (Hamberger et al, 1997). Furthermore, a woman’s ‘fear trigger mechanisms’ may be so sensitive that she continues to ‘protect’ herself in the present, from the past, even though her current partner has never abused her (Irwin et al, 2010). However, not all research explains women’s violence as defensive or retaliatory. It is recognised that some women act violently without provocation (Byrd & Davis, 2009; Swan & Snow, 2003). Whilst the idea that violent individuals might feel angry or want attention is not really a revelation, a number of studies have confirmed these as motivational factors for women’s violence (Miller & Meloy, 2006; Olson & Lloyd, 2005; Seamans et al, 2007; Stuart et al, 2006; Weston et al, 2007). How the accounts of the women I spoke to ‘fit’ with what we know about female abuse/violence is explored below.

**Women’s stories**

Free Association Narrative Interviews (FANI) were carried out with ten women presenting as perpetrators of domestic abuse against their partners and/or ex-partners, a methodology pioneered by Hollway and Jefferson (1998, 1999, 2000) and adopted by Gadd (2000) (whose methodological approach is discussed in Chapter 5). The women were between the ages of seventeen and fifty one and recruited through services for young women and probation referral centres. Each of the ten women were interviewed twice - each interview lasting about an hour - spaced about two weeks apart. The women’s experiences of domestic abuse, both historical and contemporary, were explored in the first interview by asking them; ‘tell me the story of your relationship’. The follow-up interview offered the opportunity to address any areas highlighted as requiring further inquiry for example, gaps, avoidances, inconsistencies and/or changes in delivery style.
From the recorded and transcribed data, a case summary or ‘pen portrait’ was produced for each interviewee. This provided a textual picture of the interviewee’s case material. For the purposes of this chapter, extracts from the stories of all ten women are considered: Jane, Mary, Amy, Alina, Abbey, Kate, Beth, Marie, Ann and Carla. Without exception, all the women I spoke to had stories of one, or more, type of abuse and spoke openly not only about adult experiences of abuse by their partners, but also childhood experience of neglect; sexual abuse including incest and domestic violence. In terms of abuse between parents, seven women had experienced this. Six women had experienced neglect and/or non-sexual abuse by parent/s, step-parent/s, sibling/s, or grandparent/s. Half of the women had experienced incestuous abuse by parent/s, sibling/s, or grandparents. One woman had also experienced sexual abuse from an extended family member. Six women had experienced sexual assaults by non-family members (for quick reference table of women’s accounts of abuse in childhood by type see Appendix F). Whilst the women’s accounts revealed that they had all experienced absolute disempowerment in their lives, they nearly all (9 women) attempted to ‘fit’ their experiences within one of three discursive frameworks: *Victimised and damaged*; *Resilient and protective*; *Vengeful and seeking reprisal*. One woman (Alina) was the exception adopting at some point all three discursive frameworks for her story.

**Victimised and damaged**

Three women Amy, Alina and Marie positioned themselves as *victimised and damaged*. This was a discourse in line with the understanding that women’s violence is symptomatic of their histories of victimisation and psychological distress (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009) that has caused them to lose their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172). Amy, Alina and Marie had lived in a context of fear as a result of the kind of severe, violence, coercion and control by the men around them, that the evidence shows many women suffer (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013). These women all spoke of their childhood and adult experiences of victimisation having resulted in their psychological harm. They described not being in control of their tempers, driven to perpetrate abuse for
which they were not accountable. Amy, for example, talked of her lifetime of abuse having resulted in her ‘split personality’ as a result of a ‘traumatised’ ‘mind’, whilst Alina said her victimisation had turned her into a ‘monster’. Marie’s description of putting up emotional ‘barriers’, whilst a less ‘dramatic’ way to convey the psychological harm that she felt she had sustained, was her way of explaining how a life of trauma had resulted in her inability to negotiate a healthy relationship.

Amy was a twenty year old white British woman, who I met through a support service for young mothers. Amy started her interview by telling me ‘I used to be in a domestic violence relationship when I was about fifteen’ with a young man aged ‘nineteen’. She said that initially he would be controlling, hiding her ‘make up’ and her ‘straighteners’, but ‘about six months in the relationship’ he began to hit her. Amy described being ‘insecure’ and suspecting that he was ‘cheating’ on her. She recalled one time he was suspicious of her, had ‘grabbed her phone’ and ‘chucked it at the wall’ and had then demanded ‘sexual intercourse’. Amy told me that when she had ‘said no’ he started ‘pushing and shoving’ her and when she ran away he had caught up with her, ‘grabbed’ her, and ‘dragged’ her home by her ‘hair’. Amy also spoke of the relationship that she was in when I interviewed her. She said that he did not trust her to be faithful so he had checked her ‘knickers’ were not ‘fancy’ before she left the house. She described how he had made her feel ‘worthless’ by ‘walking all over’ her, goading her about childhood experiences of sexual abuse and calling her ‘a scat’, or ‘a slag’. She also admitted having given him a ‘slap’, ‘pinched’ him and having smashed up ‘four’ of his Xboxes. Amy said that all he did was play on computer games, refusing to help around the house, or to spend any ‘family’ time with her and their daughter by, for example, going for walks in the park or baking cakes together. When I asked Amy if she thought that she was abusive she said ‘yeah definitely’, but that her own abusive actions were as a result of a ‘personality disorder’ that she had developed as a result of her own experiences of physical and sexual abuse. These experiences included the sexual abuse by her stepfather, being raped by one of her boyfriend’s uncles when she was ‘fourteen’, an attempted rape by a ‘Gyppo’ ‘lad’ at a similar age, being raped by two men in her flat when she was fifteen, ‘just turning sixteen’ and watching her own mother’s violent relationship:
I think it’s because it’s what I’ve seen because what Mark (her step-dad) used to do to me mum… Er, obviously that has rubbed off, like rubbed on, on me with this relationship I am in now…it’s like I’ve learnt from it. It’s like learnt behaviour so when I’ve seen what me mum’s done to him or he’s done to her, that’s what I’m doing to my fella.

Amy described having been diagnosed with a ‘split personality’ as a result of a ‘traumatised’ ‘mind’ that meant that she did not ‘know’ what she was ‘doing’:

I change. Er I don’t really know when I’m changing really... Yeah, if you can feel it because it’s switching, you can control it but I says to him I can’t control it though because I mean I’m in a different state of mind when I’m that person.

Amy recalled one such incident when her partner failed to stop their daughter, by then a toddler, from falling off the bed:

I ran in like, ‘cos she was crying and it was like holding it in and she was like phew, phew, blowing in her face and I did hit him for it and she did see me and I says to her, “Mummy is naughty for hitting Daddy” ‘cos she’s at that age. I had to say sorry because I don’t want her doing it... I just don’t want me daughter seeing what I’ve seen and been through. I want to like do the opposite... I make sure that she isn’t in the room because at the end of the day, I don’t want her to see what I’ve seen. It’s not nice.

Despite having grown up in a neglectful and abusive environment herself, I was surprised that Amy had such an idealised image of family life. She had spoken of how she expected her partner to go for walks in the park and bake cakes with her and their daughter, ideas I suspected that she learnt not from her own experience of childhood, but from media portrayals of ‘good’ family life. Clearly Amy’s expectation of parenting a child with the man she loved was not being met. Whilst Amy tried her best to negotiate difficult family situations, her ‘traumatised mind’ left
her ill equipped to maintain control over the feelings of resentment, disappointment and anger she felt towards her partner.

Alina was a thirty seven year old British woman, first generation Pakistani, who I met through a probation service. Like Amy, Alina spoke of the emotional psychological harm years of abuse had caused her. She described how she had been ‘turned’ ‘into’ a ‘monster’ due to the victimisation she had suffered during her marriage. Alina had been forced to get married whilst in Pakistan, at the age of seventeen. She said that:

Within three months of being married to him he, basically gave me a black eye because I was twenty minutes late coming home.

It was an abusive marriage which lasted twenty years, during which time Alina had seven children. She told me how she had been ‘knocked’ ‘unconscious’, had sustained ‘fractured… ribs on three different occasions’ and ‘fractured a nerve’ in her face, which left her with ‘no feeling’ down ‘one side’. She described how he burnt her with cooking fat on her arm and she had to go to hospital, but that she made ‘stupid excuses’ about what had happened. She described how he beat her so badly during one pregnancy that the baby was born prematurely. Yet despite all the abuse and the fact that he had ‘many’ other women, she told said that she had ‘learned to love him’. Alina told me that she finally left him after he attacked and nearly killed her. She revealed that having exited her marriage she had a brief relationship with a man who she attacked violently with a shovel (see the Vengeful and seeking reprisal section below). Alina provided an account of this incident as testament that she had become someone who she neither recognised, or she could control:

I don’t know, I think back to it, you know, what kind of a person he’s made me into… I do sometimes think he’s turned me into some kind of monster.
Alina had made the connection between her own victimisation, the resultant psychological harm and her inability to control her own temper: In doing so she presented herself as not being just born ‘mad’, or ‘bad’, but made that way by the trauma she had experienced.

Like Alina, Marie described the psychological harm that years of her own abuse had resulted in. Marie was a fifty one year old, white British woman who I met through a probation service. Marie also revealed historical sexual abuse by her brother and his friends from ‘the age of ten to fifteen’. She also described a catalogue of relationships in which she had been victimised. She spoke of her first relationship with ‘an Asian guy’. She said that the first incident of violence was when she was ‘six months pregnant’ with his child. She said that she lost the baby ‘because he kicked me, punched me in the stomach’. Despite that incident, Marie said that she stayed with him and they moved away from her home town. She said that when she got pregnant again he ‘beat’ her to ‘go on the game’. Marie described how when she eventually tried to leave him, he had ‘snatched’ her off the street and ‘held’ her captive ‘for five days’ in a ‘house’. Marie said that she was found by the police and returned home, but that she ‘ended up with another Asian guy and he did exactly the same’. During that relationship she went ‘onto the streets’ as a prostitute. Marie told me that since then she had been married three times and ‘every marriage was violent’. However, at the point that I interviewed her she was in a relationship with a man whom she described as ‘not violent’ and ‘a very nice man’ who ‘doesn’t argue’. Nonetheless, she admitted that she was abusive towards him, as she would ‘come over aggressive’, ‘bite’ his ‘head off’ and refuse to ‘go out with him’, despite recognising that it is ‘not nice for him’ and ‘he doesn’t deserve it’. Marie cited her experiences of victimisation as being the ‘trigger’ for her own violence and the reason that she could not function positively within a non-abusive relationship. Marie said that as a result of the lifetime of abuse, she was unable to connect emotionally with her partner:

I’ve put up them barriers, because I keep thinking it’s going to happen all over again… Yet I know it’s not, because, he’s not that type of bloke… But nobody realises just how much barriers you do
Amy, Alina and Marie had framed themselves as *victimised and damaged*. This was a discourse through which they had linked their childhood and adult experiences of victimisation with their psychological harm - harm that they presented as the reason for not controlling their tempers, thus driven to perpetrate abuse for which they were not accountable. By positioning themselves as *victimised and damaged*, the women had entrenched themselves in the key discourse that explains women’s violence as symptomatic of their histories of victimisation and psychological distress (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009). Hence, the women had rebutted the idea that they were born ‘mad’, or ‘bad’, but instead made to lose their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172) as a result of their own traumatic experiences.

**Resilient and protective**

Whilst three women (Amy, Alina, Marie) had described their victimisation resulting in their inability to control their tempers, in line with the understanding that women’s violence is a response to their own victimisation (Hester, 2009; Blair-Merritt, 2010; Muftic et al, 2007; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Dobash & Dobash, 1979), seven women (Jane, Mary, Carla, Ann, Abbey, Kate, Alina) also spoke of being compelled to act aggressively as a means of protecting themselves and/or their children from abuse/violence from their partner/ex-partner. This was an empowering discourse through which the women rejected images of helpless victimhood in favour of positioning themselves as agentic, resilient individuals capable of regaining control. In line with Barry’s view of the victim as ‘an active, striving agent in her own behalf’ (1979: 42), these women described strategies of defence and resistance at all stages of their relationships, strategies not exclusively engaged in when preparing to leave (Mahoney, 1994). Furthermore, as has been described by Picart (2003), Jane, Mary, Carla, Ann, Abbey and Alina, all described a ‘straddle from day to day’ between positions of ‘agency and powerlessness’ (Picart, 2003: 97), their talk of disempowerment punctuated with talk of ‘Dutch courage’ being ‘strong’ and gaining ‘control’.
Jane was a thirty-five-year-old white British woman who I gained access to through a probation support provider (see Chapter 7, for a psychosocial analysis of Jane’s story). Jane’s experience of violence was not specific to her adulthood and she described her significant experience of abuse as a child. This involved a drunken, violent step-father, a biological father who had raped her at ‘fifteen’ and, although she could not remember how old she was, a sexual assault by a female babysitter whilst the sitter’s boyfriend watched. Jane maintained that this history had contributed to her poor choice in men, choices that had ultimately led her to kill her husband, whilst defending herself:

I’m not a murderer and it’s just I got put in a position and I was protecting myself.

Jane spoke of how, despite the abuse and violence that she had suffered, she had always felt mentally strong enough to defend herself verbally:

I will stand up and stand my ground and I think that’s why I get beat because I won’t back down, I will back down, obviously I won’t be hit and I will speak my mind, you know… I’m strong in that way, you know, mentally.

Mary was a thirty-seven-year-old white British woman whom I gained access to via a probation service. Mary started her account by speaking of an abusive relationship in which both she and her partner were heroin addicts. She spoke of having left her baby son with her parents following an argument with them over her drug use:

Me and my ex-partner went to live on the streets. At first, it started with, he got me into sex work and it was through emotional abuse really then, you know, “if you don’t go out and do this, if I go out and do something I’m going to get arrested…Your family don’t want you so what’s going to happen if I wasn’t here, what’s going to happen to you, who’s going to look after you? You’ve got nobody”.
She told me that when she did not want to go out and prostitute herself, he would ‘hit’ her and ‘dragged’ her ‘out’ by her ‘hair’. Mary also told me of an incident that had ended with her pushing her partner down the stairs. She described to me how in the run up to that incident her and her partner had stopped taking heroin and started drinking heavily instead. She spoke of how she had been ‘arguing with him’ and how he was ‘in’ her ‘face’, which she said resulted in her having ‘just pushed him away … and he’s just gone down the stairs’:

I wouldn’t just sit there and take it. It’s like they say, it’s Dutch courage and it was. When I’d got a drink inside me it made me angry for what he was doing, so I would retaliate back because that was the only time that I had the courage to do it.

Mary asserted:

I have been emotionally and physically abused for years so no, I’m not a perpetrator. It was an act of retaliation.

Carla, a thirty seven year old white British woman who I met through a probation service, spoke of how early on in the relationship her partner had started calling her ‘fat’ and controlling her money, but that she had found the strength to say ‘no’ to his pressure on her to prostitute herself. Towards the end of the relationship, she made the decision to ‘distance’ herself from her partner and not to do what he asked, so despite having funded his drug habit for seven months she started to refuse to give him money. This resistance by Carla ultimately ended in an attack on her, during which she had acted defensively raising her fists and kicking him in an attempt to stop the punches she was sustaining from him. Despite this traumatic experience, Carla spoke of the strength she felt once the relationship had ended:

I’ve made a conscious decision that I’m not going to play victim. I’m not stopping in my house and crying. I’ve got to be strong and it has made me a hell of a lot stronger and it’s horrible to say it, but it’s like he’s knocked, he’s hit, when he hit me, he’s knocked the fight back into me into the strong person that I was before.
Like Carla, Ann had described acts of resistance in her abusive relationship. Ann was a forty-five-year-old alcoholic and spoke of being a victim of ‘head games’ and physical violence by her partner. Whilst Ann had described experiencing significant violence, including his ‘kicking’ her repeatedly in the ribs, she also described her own act of gaining control over her partner. During a mid-period of their relationship when he was at his most abusive, she described ignoring his requests for ‘help’:

I’ve seen him pretend to have a panic attack. It’s a hundred percent fake. But he’s very good at it. He’s an actor… Oh good lord, he was on the ground punching the ground like a two year old having a tantrum and going “Help me” and I just thought “if you’re having a heart attack can you do it not near the stairs so I don’t have to step over you”… That’s what I thought. Oh I couldn’t say it.

Ann’s omission to act to help her partner was her means of gaining some control amid the attacks that she sustained from him.

Abbey was a seventeen-year-old white British woman I had met through a support service for young mums, who also spoke of taking back control. Abbey was willing to describe her and her partner as having ‘took it in turns’ in terms of the abuse. She described her partner as a ‘weed’ smoker, ‘very controlling…He was horrible’ and ‘paranoid’. She said that he would not let her ‘out of the house’ and called her a ‘dirty little slag’. She told me that as a result of not being allowed out she had lost her friends and family. Abbey gave me an example of an incident during which she had violently resisted. Abbey described how she had tried to leave the house, but that he had tried to stop her. She said that he had ‘slapped’ her ‘face’ and had dragged her by her ‘clothes’ and ‘hair’, a fight ensued, during which she felt that she had gained ‘control’:

I didn’t want to fight I just wanted to leave… and by that time I’d had enough, I switched because I’ve got a bad temper anyway and I just leathered him… Kicking him, punching him, throwing
stuff at him… “open it or I kick it down”… I cut all his face and stuff. I was scared because he kept running at me.

Abbey spoke of how she acted to gain the ‘power’ back during a relationship break. When the relationship resumed, she maintained that power by tormenting her partner with regards to whether or not he was the baby’s father:

Then we split up and he started smoking weed again and he was even trying to control me when we split up… But I, because we weren’t together, I was then, was the one with the power - “no chance! You’ve got no chance!” And then he went dead nice again. We got back together, I got pregnant and when I was pregnant … I used to be a big part of our arguments when I was pregnant. My temper went through the roof. I would get wound up at everything. I would be ringing him up if he was ten minutes late… I used to wind him up, I know what winds him up like I could, I could ring him up and wind him up down the phone if I wanted to. Yeah, I think I was just doing it, just. I can remember once we’d had a huge argument and everyone kept saying that the baby was me ex’s baby from when we’d split up… We split up for two weeks and I’d slept with his mate to wind him up to like, to get me own revenge…. I knew it would wind him up and that was me playing my head games too because I knew that it’d get at him. I knew it would proper hurt him inside. That’s why I did it and that’s why I say like why I am in the wrong.

Despite feeling that she was ‘wrong’ to ‘wind’ her partner ‘up’, she clearly felt a sense of empowerment by acting that way. On the face of it the inequalities that Abbey faced as a young single pregnant woman made her vulnerable. However, as observed by Donovan et al (2014: 25), less ‘obvious’ markers of power should not be overlooked (see page 25). The ‘break’ from the relationship had been an opportunity for Abbey to gain control. It was a time that her partner felt vulnerable with regards to her feelings towards him and Abbey’s power over him was that she knew the paternity of her child. Whilst Abbey was not under imminent threat of
abuse/violence from her partner, her account revealed that she felt that maintaining emotional control was a means of preventing his opportunity to dominate her.

Kate was a forty-two year old white British woman who I met through a probation service. She was a small and nervous woman, who clearly felt uncomfortable at the start of the interview, but nonetheless was willing to divulge intimate details of her life. Kate started by describing her cohabiting relationship when she was seventeen years old as a ‘violent’ one. She recalled one incident whereby her partner had ‘locked’ her in a ‘pantry’ for a ‘few hours’ because he didn’t want her to go to visit her mum. She told me that when he finally let her out, she ‘got hit by a dog chain’ causing her to have ‘stitches all down’ her ‘head’. Kate said that she was then ‘rescued’ from that relationship by a man who was ‘dead nice’, but that he then he also started being violent towards her. She recalled one time, when she was seven months pregnant, his ‘swinging’ her ‘around by’ her ‘hair’. Kate said that she had ‘lost’ eight children who had been removed from her care by social services and that she was ‘fighting’ to keep the ‘baby’ she had ‘just had’. Kate described one incident whereby she had fought to protect herself:

It was about a year ago and he had me by my hair, I couldn’t breathe because he had my head down that much pulling my hair and I did manage to get up and get him round the neck and I did nearly strangle him, but I didn’t... just wanted him to go away and I wanted to hurt him at the time... I just wanted him to get away from me because I thought I was going to die because I couldn’t breathe when he had my head down.

This act of resistance had resulted in Kate having ‘nearly’ strangled her partner, as she wanted to ‘hurt’ him, for hurting her.

Whilst Alina had framed herself as a victimised and damaged (see Victimised and damaged section above), like Kate, she also described acts of resistance within her violent twenty year forced marriage. Alina said that she started to frighten her husband by telling him, “don’t go to sleep cos I will end up killing you” - a threat
that she said he took seriously because he would go to his mum’s house to stay. She described how when he was asleep and she was covered in ‘bruises and bumps’, she would think “I should kill you”. Alina spoke of how towards the end of her abusive relationship with her husband she began to fight back as she needed to stay alive for her children:

I think by that point I just used to think he’s going to kill me one of these days and who’s going to look after my kids, so I think towards the end I think I had about two punch-ups with him, yeah, I came off worse but … I defended myself.

She also spoke of wanting to protect her children from the emotional damage that witnessing violence in their home would have resulted in:

I just wanted to be safe… I didn’t want my kids to keep seeing me getting battered all the time. Where I have got girls I didn’t want them to think it was normal for a bloke to hit them and I didn’t want my boys to think it was normal for them to hit women.

Whilst all the women I interviewed had spoken of their extensive histories of victimisation, seven women (Jane, Mary Carla, Ann, Abbey, Kate, Alina) punctuated their accounts of disempowerment with talk of their acts of defence and resistance. Jane had spoken of how she spoke her ‘mind’ and being ‘mentally’ ‘strong’. Mary had spoken of having ‘Dutch courage’. Carla had spoken of having the strength to say ‘no’ and how the ‘fight’ had been ‘knocked’ into her. Ann had spoken of her passive aggressive omission to ‘help’ her partner when he needed it. Abbey had spoken of her partner having ‘no chance’ at being the one with the ‘power’ after their short separation, as before they got back together she started to ‘wind’ him ‘up’ about her fidelity and his paternity of her baby. Kate had spoken of being driven to ‘nearly strangle’ her partner, wanting to ‘hurt’ him for hurting her. Alina had spoken of the threats she made to her husband that she was going to ‘kill’ him and the ‘punch-ups that she had with him to ensure that she survived in order to look after her children. This was empowering talk for these women
through which they rejected helpless victimhood, instead positioning themselves ‘active’ and ‘striving’ agents (Barry, 1979: 42) capable of ‘fighting’ for their survival.

**Vengeful and seeking reprisal**

Whilst seven women (Jane, Mary Carla, Ann, Abbey, Kate, Alina) had spoken of their defensive and resistance acts to protect themselves and/or their children, two women (Alina, Beth) spoke of having decided to never accept victimisation again without reprisal. Both Alina and Beth had referred to themselves as ‘perpetrators’, speaking of having acted violently as reprisal for emotional hurt, despite not being in danger. Their ‘powerful’ talk of vengeance against cruel and/or deceitful men who deserve what they get, is indicative that some women may use violence to dominate and control because they are angry with their partner (Caldwell et al, 2009), anger that may be an expression of the emotional hurt that their partner has caused them (Follingstad et al, 1991).

Of all the women I interviewed, Alina stood out as an exception. Whilst all the other women took up only one discursive position, Alina was the only women who, whilst not simultaneously, had at some point in her account adopted all three of the discursive positions i.e. *Victimised and damaged; Resilient and protective; Vengeful and seeking reprisal*. Whilst Alina had spoken of the psychological harm that she had sustained during her violent twenty year forced marriage, which she said had turned her into a ‘monster’, she had also described the defensive and resistant strategies that she had adopted amidst her victimisation. Alina also spoke of how once she had left her violent marriage, she was to levy a vengeful attack on a man with whom she had a brief relationship. Alina had told me that she had been ‘seeing somebody’ for a period of ‘five months’, describing him as ‘a lying, scheming rat’, who was in fact married. Whilst this new man had been deceitful and cruel, Alina made no reference to him ever acting violently. When the relationship ended she said that he had been racist to her and her children, saying that they should not be allowed in the park and calling her a “nigger”. She spoke of refusing to let anyone get away with hurting her again:
I never used to be, I’d never argue with anybody. But now I won’t let anybody basically hurt me or do anything to me or do anything to my kids…I think by that point I wasn’t going to let anybody else do that to me.

Alina said that as a result of this, she had ‘ended up’ going to his house and ‘pasting him’ with a ‘shovel’. She described how she ‘just lost the plot’ and how, ‘all the anger’ that she had pent up during her marriage, this new man ‘got it’ instead. Alina told me that she had subsequently been ‘arrested’ ‘eight times’, as he had accused her of having ‘jumped on the bonnet’ of his car and threatened him. As a result of these accusations, Alina was not allowed to ‘even walk in the area’ where her ex-partner lived. She reflected on how she had gone from being the abused to the abuser:

I was a victim and now I’m a perpetrator as well, so… it’s just mad,
I just think my whole life has just been turned upside down and it’s all through domestic violence, like being a victim and being a perpetrator, both things have just got me into loads of trouble.

In making this statement, Alina expressed that she felt she could not ‘win’ - whether as a victim, or as a perpetrator, domestic violence was the cause of her problems. She is also acknowledging the journey that she has taken; a journey that had started with the forced marriage of an innocent young woman who eventually learnt to fight for survival and whose unresolved anger and pain had ultimately led to her own ‘monstrous’ attack on a man who posed no physical danger to her (see Chapter 7, for a psychosocial analysis of Alina’s story).

Like Alina’s, Beth’s account also revealed a level of choice that preceded her acts of violence. Beth was a twenty five year old British woman who I met through the probation service. Like all of the women I had spoken with, Beth had experienced abuse as a child. For her, it was in the form of parental neglect and sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather ‘between five and ten’ years old. Beth told me that she had perpetrated violence towards her partner because she could not tolerate the emotional hurt that he caused her. Beth recalled:
This gentleman was all right at first and then he started being a little bit controlling and a little bit abusive, verbally. And as the relationship got on after a year of being with him, we’d both been drinking one night and it all come out and he started throwing slang at me and vicious words and stuff like that and more than four times I assaulted him – I’ve hit him with bottles. I’ve hit him with monkey wrenches. I’ve punched him. I’ve popped both of his eyes at the top of his eyebrows, and it was all due to him being verbally abusive regarding my family.

Beth spoke of how she had consciously decided to become stronger than him in order to physically gain control in the relationship. Ironically she said that he had ‘taught’ her to ‘Kick Box’ and ‘how to punch’ and had ‘bought’ her ‘a punch bag for Christmas and weights’:

The more weights I pumped the harder I was getting and the more time I spent on my punch bag the harder I was getting.

Beth said that because she was ‘a little bit bigger than him’ and had become physically stronger, she was ‘always used to getting the upper hand’. She admitted that there had been occasions that she had ‘knocked him clean out’. Beth said that her partner’s provocation for her violence had been that he had teased her about her grandfather’s sexual abuse of her. Beth told me that she was ‘arrested’ ‘four times’, but showed little remorse, stating it was:

Understandable that I would react the way I did.

Alina and Beth had been vocally resolute in their commitment to no longer be viewed as victims. Their accounts lend support to the notion that power and, therefore perpetration, does not necessarily permanently reside with one party. The dynamic could shift within that relationship, or the abused could become the abuser in a subsequent relationship (Ristock, 2002). Despite the lack of danger, these women were intolerant of any man who slighted them. Whilst they had not defended themselves from, or retaliated against physical attack, their violent actions were within the context of their own emotional victimisation (Follingstad et
al, 1991). Hence ‘blinkered’ with both historical and contemporary feelings of anger, these women felt empowered speaking of their vengeance.

**Conclusion**

All ten of the women whose stories are told in this chapter had spoken openly about: childhood experience of neglect, sexual abuse including incest and domestic violence; and, adult experiences of abuse and violence by their partners. Whilst the women’s accounts revealed that they had all experienced considerable disempowerment in their lives, they nearly all (9 women) attempted to ‘fit’ their experiences within one of three discursive frameworks: *Victimised and damaged*; *Resilient and protective*; *Vengeful and seeking reprisal*.

Three of the women had invested in the *victimised and damaged* discourse, describing their perpetration as symptomatic of their histories of victimisation (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009). These women rejected the idea that they were born ‘bad’, or ‘mad’, but instead driven to lose their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172) by their abusers. Hence, the psychological harm that they had sustained was cited as the reason that they should not be held accountable for their actions.

Seven women had positioned themselves as resistant survivors, *resilient and protective* of themselves and - for those women who were mothers - of their children. This discourse was in line with the understanding that women’s violence is a response to their own victimisation (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Muftic et al, 2007; Blair-Merritt, 2010). This was an empowering talk as it rejected the ‘undesirable connotations’ of being a ‘damaged, passive, and powerless’ victim (Best, 1997: 13). These women described acts of resistance being employed at all stages of their abusive relationships i.e. the beginning, middle and end and not exclusively when they were preparing to leave (Mahoney, 1994).

Two women had positioned themselves as *vengeful and seeking reprisal*, making it clear that they would no longer tolerate men’s cruelty and/or deceitfulness.
These women would rather be victimisers, than ever be a victim again. This was talk of vengeance against men who had emotionally hurt them (Follingstad et al, 1991). Despite such men not posing a risk of danger, the women had levied anger fuelled violence against them (Caldwell et al, 2009). Whilst these women had not defended themselves from, or retaliated against physical attack, they had discursively positions their violence within the context of their own emotional victimisation. Arguably for these disadvantaged women, violence is their way of ‘crafting their own versions of femininity and survival’ (Lopez et al, 2009: 247)

One woman (Alina) who had spoken of being vengeful and seeking reprisal stood out amongst the female cohort. Rather than ‘fit’ her story within one discursive framework, Alina had, at some point, adopted all three discursive positions. She spoke of being, victimised and damaged, resilient and protective and vengeful and seeking reprisal. She was also the only woman who at the time of interview was still attending court for the violent offences that she had committed in her most recent relationship. I suggest that this pressure in her life had meant that Alina was in the midst of reappraising her life against a mixture of support and accusations from others. Alina clearly had unresolved anger evidenced by the ‘venomous’ tone that she adopted when speaking of her most recent relationship, an anger that I believed warranted further exploration (see Chapter 7).

The women’s accounts confirm the experiential relevance of gender. Despite these women having presented as perpetrators, the common thread running through their accounts is that of the ‘chronic’, ‘multi-faceted’ ‘oppression’ (Stark, 2013: 19) that they had suffered throughout their lives. The severe and sustained nature of the abuse that they spoke of, was in line with what we already know about some women’s (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013) and young girls’ experiences of domestic violence (Lombard, 2010; Barter & McCarry, 2013). These were individuals disadvantaged, not only by structural inequality as women, but also by the gendered nature of their experiences of having to grow up in abusive homes, or foster care, where sexual abuse was common place, either at the hands of strangers, or family members. As a result, these were women with limited support networks, or what Donovan et al. (2014: 26) call ‘social, or cultural
‘capital’, with which to negotiate adult relationships. For some women like Amy and Beth, the sharing of such intimate ‘secrets’ of sexual abuse with partners, empowered their men who used such knowledge as an opportunity to hurt and provoke them. The threat of humiliating information being disclosed was for them, arguably, not unlike the fear of being ‘outed’ experienced by gay men and lesbian women (Ristock, 2002).

They were not totally and forever disempowered, however. Opportunities for the women to empower themselves did arise within the course of relationships when previously they were powerless. For Abbey her pregnancy meant that she saw the opportunity for her partner to have ‘no chance’ at being the one with the ‘power’ as she had undermined his security by casting doubt over the paternity of her baby. Abby’s account supports the understanding that power and, therefore, perpetration does not necessarily permanently reside with one party (Ristock, 2002), as power could shift within relationships, or between relationships. This was also evidenced by Alina’s account of losing the ‘plot’ and putting ‘six stitches’ in her ex-partners ‘head’ with a ‘shovel’, despite her never having been in danger from him. Whilst Alina and Beth had been candid, such feelings of vengefulness were not so easily articulated by the other women I spoke to. Their accounts were constrained by the dominant discourses surrounding abusive women. These women, much like Barnes’ lesbian cohort were living with the ‘silence and denial’ surrounding female abusiveness (Barnes, 2010: 233). The social unacceptability of female aggression left these women with limited explanatory frameworks. Hence, the discursive positions of the women I interviewed reflect their limited range of options with regard to how they could depict themselves, socially and emotionally. Ultimately, they struggled to articulate the anger, pain, shame and stigma that stems from, experiences of domestic abuse, incest, non-familial rape, forced marriage, and/or the loss of children, whilst also trying to ‘fit’ their stories within more conventionally gendered discourses of domesticity, marriage and motherhood.
Chapter 7

A psychosocial understanding of three female perpetrators:

Jane, Marie and Alina

The psycho-discursive exploration of ten female perpetrators’ accounts of abuse, presented in Chapter 6, showed how the women adopted one or more of three discursive positions i.e. *Victimised and damaged*; *Resilient and protective*; *Vengeful and seeking reprisal*. These positions were reflective of the combination of the gendered constraints around what can be commonly said about women who are abusive, their own understandings of the pain they suffered, and their attempts to avoid shame and stigma in the contexts of domesticity, motherhood and failed and damaging intimate relationships. As was recognised with the psycho-discursive exploration of male victim’s accounts in Chapter 4, such analysis is valuable as it provides us with an understanding of how identities are produced by discourse that in turn can ‘come to structure how we all think, feel and talk’ (Edley, 2001: 224). This really matters because, as became clear in Chapter 6, socially acceptable explanations for women’s abusiveness are far fewer than those available to men. Hence women who have been abusive attempt to ‘force’ their unique and complex experiences to ‘fit’ within a more limited explanatory framework. This makes the need for a methodological approach that recognises an individual’s unique subjectivities - including their unspeakable fears, anxieties, insecurities, motivations, and desires - all the more pressing. This chapter attempts to deliver on this by providing a psychosocially literate understanding of three female perpetrators of domestic abuse: Jane, Marie and Alina.

I start by providing a ‘pen portrait’ or summary of their individual stories, followed by an interpretatively driven analysis of their account. This reveals that the incoherence and contradiction present in the women’s accounts (as was the case with the male victim’s accounts in Chapter 4) should not be viewed as necessarily
evidencing deceit, but instead read as their attempts to guard against painful feelings and behaviour rendered shameful in the context of ideals of femininity: for Jane the painful reality of the life she had lived - that her life had not been the ‘lovely’ experience of domesticity that she thought many women enjoy/hope for; for Marie the idea that not ‘everyone’ is deserving of a second chance - that she had been unable to live up to her mother’s family ethos that you stay together however dysfunctional; and for Alina the reality that her anger at being the victim of racism by an ex-partner, was in part rooted in her experience of racist victimisation by her parents - that she had not been able to live up to her culturally-imposed ‘duty’ as a wife and daughter to make a success of the partnership chosen for her.

Jane’s pen portrait

Jane was a thirty-five year old English woman, who I gained access to through a probation support provider. Jane hung her head as she walked into the interview room, only when she sat down was I able to see her face. I was instantly moved by how troubled she looked.

Jane’s experiences growing up

Jane spoke of her life being a ‘roundabout’ of abuse having ‘learnt’ about violence in the home from her parents. She spoke of having to phone the police when her mum was ‘screaming for help’, when her step father ‘was strangling’ her mum and when he ‘threw’ her mum ‘down the stairs’. Jane said she would ‘hide’ her siblings. However, she recalled on one occasion her sister hiding her, as her step dad had found out that it was she who had contacted the police:

Well, a time when I could hear my mum screaming and John, my step-dad was strangling my mum and I hid under my sister. He come in looking for me cos I’d phoned the police. I hid under my sister in the cupboard, pushed her inside because I knew he
wanted to get me... My sister was two and a half years younger than me and she’d sort of hid me in her bed, cos he was after me and we waited till he fell asleep.

Jane spoke of the physical mess the house would be in afterwards with ‘the television upside down and all clothes strewn across the floor, all clothes strewn across the garden’. Jane recalled how they would go to live at her auntie’s, but her step-dad would ‘come begging’, and her mother would return to him. For ‘a bit’ things would be ‘good’, but then they would see ‘mum being hit’ again.

Jane said that her step dad eventually left her mum taking his biological son, Jane’s half-brother, with him; a brother that she did not see for another seventeen years. Jane remembered there also being what she described as ‘a bit of violence’ between her real dad and her mum. One incident from when she was three years old stood out in her mind:

…Well I can remember my father, going back to when I was three, me running up the stairs because my mum had chucked his beer down the sink and he says; “Right I’m going to stab your mum”. And I can remember running up screaming “mummy, mummy, he’s going to stab you”, you know. And I can remember that fear as a child, that far back to when I was three, you know.

Jane described how her real dad died of ‘alcoholism’ at only forty one, when she was twenty one years old. She also described her mum as drinking ‘a lot’ and whenever there has been a problem ‘drink has always been the thing to go for’, stating that it was a ‘common thing’ in her family.

Jane described how she sometimes saw her mother stand up to the violence:

There was a bit of violence there but like I think my mum give it back.

Jane recalled her mother’s attempted assault on her subsequent husband, whereby she put ‘bleach in his drink’:
Yeah, and I said, “don’t please, Carl don’t drink that, she’s put bleach in it!” You know, she, I think she’d turned then and wanted like to attack all men.

Her mother and Carl divorced, after which Jane said she had ‘a string of people’, stating that there were not many people in their home town that her mother ‘hasn’t been with’. Jane said that her mother would be out all the time. Sensing that there was more to Jane’s animosity towards her mother, I asked - ‘what are you mainly angry with her about?’ Jane replied that her mother ‘didn’t look after us’ and revealed an incident of sexual abuse by her female babysitter, whereby the sitter’s ‘fella’ took a voyeuristic role:

Erm, she actually, I feel disgusted saying it … She actually sort of licked me over, basically, you know, I’m lying there and thinking … I was about nine. Yeah, I knew it was wrong. She said don’t tell your mum, and I didn’t and whatever. Her fella was there as well.

Jane told me she hated her mum because when she did tell her years later her mum had called her a ‘liar’. Just when I thought that Jane could not possibly recall any further experiences of abuse, she revealed:

I was abused by my father too… and I hate her for that because she says that I killed my father and I pushed him into an early grave because he went to court and he got two years’ probation and I had like some compensation. I was 15 when I got compensation. It was £1,500 and my mum helped me spend that by taking me down the pub with her with her boyfriend.

Jane described to me the incident of incestuous abuse with her father:

It was like, I could only go out, I was 15 and I wanted to go out clubbing with my friend, but I could only go out if my dad was in the club and I stopped the night at my granddad’s where my dad lived and I used to have to sleep on the bed and my dad on the floor. But this one night he got on the bed and caressed me there
and down there and that, I was 14, no, 15, because what it was I’d just had, lost my virginity, and my mum had told him this and my dad was a very jealous person and he was always still in love with my mum and he was very sort of protective of me and I think he didn’t like the fact that that I’d done that, kind of thing, and I can remember waking up the next morning and saying to my father, “dad what have you done, I’m going to tell”. And he said, “please Jane, please let me leave the country before you tell anybody”. And I knew what he’d done. And I just pretended I was asleep. And then he went into the bathroom and obviously he probably relieved himself or whatever.

**Jane’s adult experiences of domestic abuse**

I asked Jane to tell me the story of her abusive adult relationships, to which she answered:

Well I’ve had many. Erm, one domestic abuse one that I was actually in, I’m going back a few years now, I was actually charged with murder.

I was a bit taken aback, which I did my best to hide and she continued:

I was in a relationship for five years with a man. I had a lovely life, everything was fantastic, apart from I did have this violence. This domestic abuse and one day, he beat me that much, I snapped and my son had gone to football practice with his dad and it was a Sunday and I’d been beaten all-round the house. There was blood all over me walls. He broke me nose. He’d kicked me up me bottom with his steel toecaps and there was a knife on the living room table because I had made sandwiches for me son and I’d rushed in to answer me phone in the house and I must have put the knife down and as I was backing in because he’d had me on
the stairs and was strangling me and whatever, I’d got away and was backing away from him. I came to the table in my living room and coffee table and I saw the knife and I just picked it up and said, “No more” and as he lunged at me, it went into his heart. And it went in about an inch and he more or less instantly started dying in front of me. I was in a panic. I was nursing at the time and I’d got a good job and everything. I’d got a lovely lifestyle. I rang me sister to get the ambulance, to phone the ambulance because I was trying to help him but I didn’t know what to do. You know, he’d got a tiny cut and there wasn’t blood squirting everywhere… and I just watched him sort of die in front of me. He turned grey and died as I was holding and I was smacking his face… Yeah, as well and when the Police and the ambulance, well the ambulance didn’t come, a doctor’s car come and obviously with me being nursing, I knew that with no ambulance that they were pronouncing the time of his death and I was told to sit outside and me mum had just left. She used to live next door to me and she’d left to go abroad, so I was sitting on me mum’s doorstep next door and there were people everywhere - the police, you know, all the neighbours were out and then they just come out after a while and put me in the police car and when they drove me around the corner, they said, “Now we are arresting you on murder” you know, and I was charged with murder. I was obviously in that much of a state I was screaming hysterically in the car because I couldn’t believe he was dead.

Jane told me how, since that day she had been suffering with depression and would self-harm and that she was medicated for that and post-traumatic stress disorder. She spoke of the nightmares, panic attacks, and irritable bowel syndrome, which was so bad at times that she could not leave the house. Despite reliving the event Jane said that she had acted in self-defence:
I’m not a murderer and it’s just I got put in a position and I was protecting myself and obviously, it’s ruined me life. It’s ruined a lot of people’s lives around me. It’s ruined his life, you know, he’s died.

I asked Jane to describe their relationship in the run up to this tragic event. She described how preceding this incident her husband had started to work away and to have affairs, one of which was with her best friend. When she found this out they had started to argue more, he would leave for a while and then come back. Jane said that during this period she ‘was getting paranoid about him going out’ and he ‘kept snapping’ and getting ‘violent’. On the day that she killed him, he was ‘really drunk’ and he had wanted to go out in his car. Jane said that because she did not want him drink driving, she took his car keys and ‘hid them’. She said that was ‘why’ he got ‘the most violent I’ve ever had’. Jane described this day as different:

I would always cower, you know, kind of thing and it was never as bad as this day. It was this day when I thought that one of us would get hurt, I knew he wasn’t going to stop. You know he’d had me up the garden; he’d had me in the house, he; I was running from him; I was, you know, and everywhere he was just getting me. He just wasn’t stopping at all.

Jane told me that following her arrest, she had spent three days in prison, before being bailed to a hostel. She spoke of the ‘death threats’ she experienced from his family and how following a four day trial she was ‘acquitted’. She described how on her release, there was ‘no support whatsoever. There was nobody there’:

I was left to go home and that was it. After all the trauma and everything, I went back to me own property.

However, when she returned to her house, the father of her nine year old son had moved in to look after their son and she recalled ‘he wouldn’t let me back into the home’. Jane said that she became homeless, but started a fight for custody of her son, however she was not successful as her son remained in the house with his
dad. She told me that because she had nowhere to stay she ‘got mixed up with another bloke’, who she described as ‘a violent drinker’. She recalled how she would go to the Housing Agency, ‘with black eyes’, saying, “Listen, you’ve got to find me somewhere to live”. She told me:

I’d been made homeless and I’d lost everything - me son, me house, me home, you know, me partner. I couldn’t, you know, everything and I was just a total wreck.

Jane said that it was at that point that she ‘hit the drink’ and her depression meant that she was unable to return to work. She said that after about a year she got re-homed, but that her abusive partner was ‘still in and out’ of her life. Eventually she met another man who, after only six months, became her husband. However, she recalled how once they were married he ‘became violent’. She told me:

And then he started making out I was the perpetrator by hitting himself with things like phones and stuff and saying he was going to stab himself… and he knew me past and he knew I’d been locked up for me other partner and I’d had another partner locked up afterwards. You know, after I’d been acquitted and he knew me past and he started using it against me.

She described her husband as ‘a secret drinker’, who would take the dog out for a walk and return ‘drunk’. Jane said that because the police were ‘coming out every week’ to their home, they nearly lost the house. She described how:

It was either me being locked up, or him because he was making out I was the perpetrator and hitting himself, phoning the police screaming saying, “She’s killing me” - which I wasn’t - and I’d be locked up and you know, well basically, the police didn’t like the fact that I had, in a sense…got off with murder basically. They wanted me to go down for a long time and obviously because there’s still domestic violence in my life, they started thinking, well, I’m the perpetrator and my husband used that against me.
Jane said that she ‘finally got rid’ of him and met ‘a fantastic guy’. She told me that whilst there was no domestic violence they had both ended up going to court after having a ‘fight’ ‘a drunken brawl’ with some ‘other people’. As a result, her boyfriend, whom she described as ‘good’, was given a ‘five month’ prison sentence and she was given ‘twelve months’ probation. Jane said that whilst he was serving his sentence, she had met ‘somebody else and this somebody else I got with was an alcoholic’. Whilst she described how she was ‘supporting him’ and he was ‘supporting’ her, he was regularly getting ‘locked up’ for ‘pinching beer’ and being ‘picked up by ambulances, having fits’. Jane told me that she eventually called the police and got him ‘locked up’ for breaking into her house to sleep on her sofa, which he ‘weed’ on. Despite this man constantly calling her, Jane said that she was back with her previous partner, ‘the good one’. Jane spoke of how she felt that she had been ‘on and off that roundabout of domestic violence’ stating:

I feel that it’s like a learnt behaviour because I seem to pick all the wrong men all the time and I don’t know why it happens and I’m like, I know I’m vulnerable at the moment and I’ve had, like I suffer with depression, anxiety. I’ve had alcohol problems due to the fact of everything, losing everything and men that know me past seem to use it against me as well. You know, and they know that I hate the police because I know they hate me and they’ll just start up rows whereas this, the bloke I’m back with now, that I’m taking things slowly, is fantastic. He’s never hit me or nothing like that.

Jane spoke of how the experience of abuse when growing up had made her stronger and that she felt that she had the ‘right’ to ‘speak’ her mind, but that the men she had ‘been with’ could not ‘stand the fact’ that she was ‘strong’ ‘mentally’. However, Jane asserted that whilst she could speak up for herself, she could not ‘fight a man’.

Jane said that despite all that she had been through, she had ‘no support’ from her family, describing her relationship with her mother as ‘Vile! We clash. We’re not speaking’. She said that her mother and her sister had been ‘just nasty’ when she
had lost a baby because of an ectopic pregnancy a few months earlier. She said that they had said “Oh it’s just a baby”, but that she had wanted ‘a baby for years’. She described her loss as having ‘knocked’ her ‘world apart again’.

**Analysis**

Jane’s account was one which contained two dominant themes which I address in turn: (1) *My path to killing*; (2) ‘*A lovely life*’. In what follows I show how Jane had explained that her life of victimisation had led her to kill her husband. I also show that Jane’s depiction of ‘*a lovely life*’ was her attempt to guard herself from the painful reality of the life she had lived.

**My path to killing**

Jane had revealed a catalogue of experiences of victimisation. She had told me that her mum and all her mum’s partners had been heavy drinkers, her real dad dying at forty one from alcoholism. She recalled the alcohol induced violence that ensued, her mother being strangled, thrown down stairs and ‘screaming for help’. She had described the ‘mess’ the house would be in after such incidents. She told me there had also been ‘a bit of violence’ towards her mum from her real dad, having spoken of one fearful incident, when she was three years old, whereby he had threatened to ‘stab’ her mother. Jane had been candid about the sexual abuse that she had suffered from a female babysitter and the sitter’s boyfriend when her parents were on one of many nights in the pub. She had also disclosed that her biological father had sexually assaulted her. As an adult Jane found herself in relationships with a string of violent, adulterous alcoholic men. She had described her life as being a ‘roundabout’ of abuse, speaking of the choices that she had made and the way that she behaved as being ‘learnt’ from her parents. By contextualising her own violence this way, Jane had rejected the idea that she was innately ‘bad’, presenting her violent history as a path that had led her to kill.
It was against this backdrop of witnessing her parents’ drunken violence, incest and rape and infidelity, that Jane had forged a relationship with the husband who ultimately she was to kill.

‘A lovely life’

Whilst Jane had asserted ‘I can’t fight a man…physically’, she in fact had fought a man ‘physically’, stabbing her husband to death. Jane spoke of how the court had recognised that her responsibility for killing her husband was diminished as a result of the violence that she had experienced from him. Not only had Jane described the violence that she had experienced within the marriage, but she had also described how her husband had committed the ultimate betrayal by having sex with her best friend. She had told me how this infidelity had led to her ‘getting paranoid about him going out’, but that her attempt to stop him leaving the house had resulted in his ‘snapping’ and getting ‘violent’. Whilst Jane had spoken at length about the ‘learnt behaviour’ that had led her to choose abusive men - the husband who she had killed no exception - a glaringly contradictory discourse of the ‘lovely life’ she had experienced whilst married stood out in her story. Jane punctuated her account of the abuse she suffered by her husband - the fear, the cowering, the ‘snapping’ and ‘violence’:

I had a lovely life, everything was fantastic.

She spoke of how ‘great’ things were before his death:

Yeah, we had a nice house, we were doing the house up and everything, and you know, things were great. He helped me out with money and you know, took me out, he was proud of me.

Even Jane’s description of the moment that she watched her husband die was interjected with how ‘lovely’ ‘everything’ was:
...he more or less instantly started dying in front of me. I was in a panic. I was nursing at the time and I'd got a good job and everything. I'd got a lovely lifestyle.

The discourse of a life blighted with fear and violence morphed into a discourse of a ‘fantastic’ life, ‘a lovely lifestyle’, ‘things were, great’, ‘things were good’.

I considered why Jane’s account had become one of contradiction. An interpretatively driven understanding could provide some insight. The self-harm, the nightmares, the panic attacks, and irritable bowel syndrome, were all symptomatic of the unresolved feelings of betrayal, disempowerment and shame resulting from her experiences of both victimisation and lethal resistance. Jane had offered her history of victimisation as her path to killing (undoubtedly a discourse that she had used many times as she was processed through the criminal justice system). By contextualising the lethal assault on her husband in this way, Jane rejected the idea that she was innately ‘bad’, but instead driven to kill by her life of abuse. Whilst talk of victimisation allowed Jane to mitigate her actions, it left her vulnerable to the shame and disempowerment such memories evoked. Hence, Jane’s depiction of ‘a lovely life’ was her attempt to guard against the painful reality of the life she had lived, a life of domesticity and motherhood that could not be reconciled with her ideals of femininity.

Marie’s Pen Portrait

Marie was a fifty one year old British woman who I met through a probation support service. Despite looking worn down, she had a warm and friendly demeanour. Marie started the first interview by telling me that she had suffered ‘a breakdown’ and that she ‘wasn’t coping’. I checked that she was happy to be interviewed and she confirmed that she was.
Marie’s experiences growing up

Marie was one of five siblings and she described how her mum had ‘brought five of us up basically on her own’. Marie said that her mum had a ‘thirty’ year marriage to her step-father, who was ‘a long distance lorry driver’. Marie described her mother’s and step-father’s relationship as ‘volatile, volatile. Very volatile’ and they would be ‘throwing plates at each other and ornaments’. Marie said that her mum ‘gave as good as she got’. Despite this Marie, said that ‘they loved each other’. When I asked Marie about her childhood she immediately revealed that she ‘was sexually abused’ by her ‘brother’, who was three years older than her, from ‘the age of ten to fifteen’. She stated ‘It’s hard to talk about actually’ and went on to disclose:

I’d gone upstairs because I wasn’t feeling very well. Mum was at work and my brother and his mate, it was not just my brother, it was his mate as well... They came up. I thought they were going in his room and they came in... he came in with his mate and his mate held me down, Craig sexually abused me, then his mate did, got up and just walked out... I just cried, I cried. I can remember me brother saying, “If you tell anybody, I'll kill you”.

Marie said that she had ‘only found out recently’ that her brother had also sexually abused her sister and his own mother. Marie described her mum as having been ‘tight lipped’ at the time, but that she was ‘seeking help for him’. Marie spoke of not blaming her mum for what happened to her:

I didn’t know about my mum until recently, so why detriment my mum when it wasn’t my mum’s fault... mum knew but she didn’t want the embarrassment - I always say that. Which she wouldn’t do, she wouldn’t want it brought up that her son was raping her, plus the kids.

Once her mother had died, Marie’s step father disclosed to her that her brother -
now in a high security hospital, diagnosed as ‘schizophrenic’ - had been abusing all the female members of the family. She told me that he had ‘befriended this old woman, went back to her flat and killed her’. Marie recounted that her mum had said to her “he needs his family”, so she had visited him regularly and had ‘got into a really good relationship with him’.

Marie’s adult experiences of domestic abuse

Marie spoke of her first relationship with Jai, ‘an Asian guy’. She said that the first incident of violence was when she was ‘six months pregnant’ with his child, Marie subsequently losing the baby ‘because he kicked me - punched me in the stomach’. Despite that incident, Marie stayed with him and they moved away from her home town. She said that when she got pregnant again he ‘beat’ her to ‘go on the game’. Marie said that eventually they split and she went back to her parents, but that she had ‘got no choice’ but to leave their daughter with him. However, the next day her parents took her back and she ‘picked her up’. Marie described how ‘two weeks’ later she was on the way to ‘see a solicitor’ and he ex-partner ‘snatched’ her with ‘his mates’:

I was held for five days in this house, beaten black and blue, made to go with men. I was really ill. I ended up with, erm, they’re like a boil but they’re worse than a boil. Carbuncles, they’re called. One at the back of my neck, one under my arm, I was in so much pain and when they finally found me I was half dead….I’d got five broken ribs, a broken arm.

Marie told me that he next partner had also beaten her and told her she had to prostitute herself:

He said it to me and I said “You’ve got no chance” I said “I aren’t like that” whack, straight across the face in front of everybody.

Marie described how whilst she was out prostituting herself, her partner would put ‘her little girl’ in the flat below where they lived which she said ‘was cold’ and ‘full of
dog poo’. She described one time being ‘taken to London’ and was ‘beaten up by one of the punters’ and that was the point at which Marie said that she had ‘had enough’ so she left with her ‘little girl’ to come back to her home town. Marie described how she had left her sister babysitting her daughter, but that when her daughter came back to her, she had ‘hair brush’ marks on ‘her back’ and ‘bottom’. As a result, Marie’s daughter was taken into care and subsequently adopted. Marie said that she had never seen her daughter again and did not speak to her sister for ‘twenty odd years’. Since then, Marie had been married three times and ‘every marriage was violent’. She described getting pregnant with another daughter but that the father ‘didn’t want to know’, she then got married for the first time and had another daughter, but that relationship was also violent after their daughter was born. Marie described him as ‘a mummy’s boy’ and wanting her to do everything with his family but with her own family she ‘couldn’t do anything’. Marie described one time getting a job and when she told him he ‘punched’ her. She said that his mum would be there at the time and ‘just stood by’. Whilst the marriage continued past this incident, eventually Marie left him. However, she regretted leaving one of her children behind:

I did the wrong thing. I walked out on him and took Pam. I didn’t take Kim. I couldn’t take them both, because Pam was still in a pram at the time. I couldn’t take Kim as well because I couldn’t cope.

Marie said that she ‘regretted’ leaving one of her daughters and that she did not see her again until she was eighteen years old. After that relationship, Marie started ‘nightclubbing’ and having ‘one night stands’. Marie said that she then answered a man’s advert in the paper and they then met and married. She said that whilst her second husband was not violent, he ‘cheated’ and ‘went with a prostitute’ which Marie said ‘hurt’. Marie described having another relationship ‘that wasn’t very good’. She stated:

I wouldn’t say he was violent. He was another drunk. He only slapped me a couple of times when he’d had a drink. A really bad drunk.
When I challenged her view of a non-violent relationship by stating:

So he was violent really?

Marie responded by conceding that:

He was violent, but not as bad as I’d had in the past. He never marked me.

Marie described her third marriage, which lasted for ‘five years’, as ‘the worst mistake’. She described the relationship as ‘fine at first’, but said that as soon as they moved in together ‘things changed’, her partner - an ‘alcoholic’ - started drinking ‘a lot’. She told me that she would return from work and ‘get beat up’.

She explained:

If I didn’t meet him in the pub when I finished work when he wanted me to, I’d get beat up. If I didn’t drink, I got beat up. If I drank, I got beat up... I know I should have left him - then we got married.

She said that the ‘night before’ they were to marry she had told him that she ‘wasn’t going to marry him’, but the wedding did go ahead because she ‘doted on him’ and because it was her ‘third marriage’ she felt that she had to ‘make it work’. Marie said that at the time she did not know, but later found out that he was also ‘violent’ with her ‘daughter’. Marie described one incident when she had just had an operation on her hand and he ‘kicked’ her on it. Marie told me that when she did eventually leave him it wasn’t ‘the fact of the violence’, but because he had tried to stop her ringing the hospital to find out if her sister, who had had an operation for ‘a brain tumour’, was alright. Marie said:

I thought I don’t want this anymore. And he came back, raised his hand at me and I just rang the police and I said I want him out.

Marie said that prior to this she had ‘on numerous occasions’ called the police, but had ‘always taken him back and forgave him’. She said that there had been times that he had accused her of hitting him, but that she could not remember doing so:
…he turned round and said… a couple of times I’ve hit him, but if I’ve hit him I’ve probably been drunk and that drunk I’ve not known about it.

Marie admitted that they were both drinkers but said she ‘only drank because of him’. Marie said that she did not return to him after the incident whereby he tried to stop her ringing the hospital about her sister and that she had been ‘away from him for three years and it’s the best three years of my life’. She did, however, reveal that during those three years her brother, who had been in prison for murder, was causing her a lot of stress whilst on weekend release and visiting her home, but that being with his family was what her mum had ‘wanted’ for her brother. She said that she ‘always made sure all the family were there’, for her own ‘safety’, and she said to let him experience family life as ‘everybody deserves a second chance’. Marie said that she had agreed that her brother could come and live at her house upon his release, however as soon as she had agreed, her brother telephoned her and said “I can’t wait to come and move in with you and sleep on your bed, and put my arms round you and cuddle up to you”. Marie said that at first she thought ‘he’s being silly’, but that he then started to send her ‘porn’ and with a message - “watch that and think of me”. Marie said that as a result of this she got in touch with the authorities. Consequently, her brother is no longer allowed to come to the town in which she lives. Marie told me that as a result of the problems surrounding he brother’s release she had attempted suicide:

    I took seven overdoses because I didn’t want to be here, because he turned round and said he was going to make my life hell, and he was. He’s already done that this year.

Marie said that she had received threatening text messages, stating that he was going to ‘rape’ her. Marie said that she has informed the police about the threats and that they want her to go to court about his abuse of her as a child, but that she could not cope with doing that:

    I’m going through it in my head and I’m having flashbacks now. I don’t think I could deal with a court case at the moment.
Marie told me at the time of her interview that she was in a relationship with ‘a very nice man’ who she had known for ‘twelve’ years and that he had always ‘wanted to get with’ her. She said that in the ‘three’ years that she had been with him ‘he’s not violent’ and ‘he doesn’t argue’. However, Marie admitted that she would ‘come over aggressive’, she would ‘bite’ his ‘head off’, ‘hitting him when she was ‘drunk’ and refusing to ‘go out with him’, despite recognising that it is ‘not nice for him’ and ‘he doesn’t deserve it’. She described feeling that she ‘put up them barriers’ because she did not want to be abused again. Marie said that whilst she had been busy looking after her grandchildren, she had been able to put ‘on the back burner’ the memories of her past abuse. Now she had ‘more time’ on her ‘hands’ because she was no longer child caring those memories had come out - ‘and it’s like whoa!’.

**Analysis**

Marie’s account contained two dominant themes which I address in turn: (1) *My path to abusiveness*; (2) ‘Everyone deserves a second chance’. In what follows I show how Marie explained how her life of victimisation had led to her own acts of abuse towards her partner. I also show that through her ‘everyone deserves a second chance’ discourse Marie attempted to guard against the painful reality that ‘everyone’ may not always be deserving of a second chance.

**My path to aggression**

Marie had spoken of her parents’ marriage as being ‘very volatile’ and how her mum ‘gave as good as she got’. However, despite the conflict, Marie said that ‘they loved each other’. But behind the story of loving parents, was one of the rapes of all the female members of the family, Marie, her sister and her mother, by Marie’s older teenage brother. Marie had spoken of how the incestuous assaults by her brother and his friend had gone unchallenged and how she had not known until after the death of her mother, that her brother had also been raping her mum
and sister. Nevertheless, Marie had spoken of understanding why her mum had not acted to stop what was happening, describing her as a ‘tight lipped’ woman who had been protecting the family from the ‘shame’ of others knowing what was going on in their family. Marie had felt ‘why detriment my mum, when it wasn’t my mum’s fault’. As an adult, Marie had relationships with a string of violent men, forced into prostitution, lost a baby during pregnancy as a result of an assault on her, had one daughter taken into care and left another daughter with her abusive ex-partner, not seeing her again for eighteen years. Marie had spoken of how all this violence had resulted in ‘seven overdoses’ and ‘flashbacks’ and her putting up emotional ‘barriers’, because she did not want to be abused again. Like Jane, by contextualising her own violence this way, Marie had rejected the idea that she was innately ‘bad’, presenting her violent history as a path that had led her to abusiveness.

It was against this backdrop of witnessing her parents’ ‘volatile’ relationship, incest, rape, forced prostitution, beatings and loss of children, whether as a result of the violence she sustained, to her violent ex-partner, or to the care system, that Marie had forged her relationship with the man she was still seeing when I interviewed her.

‘Everyone deserves a second chance’

Marie had described her partner as ‘a very nice man’ who she said was ‘not violent’ and ‘doesn’t argue’. However, Marie said that she, on the other hand, would ‘come over aggressive’, biting his ‘head off’ and refusing ‘go out with him’. She had acknowledged that her behaviour was abusive and ‘not nice for him’ and that he did not ‘deserve it’. It was during this partnership that Marie’s brother who had been held in a high security hospital for murdering an old woman had started to be allowed out at weekends in preparation for his release. Marie had told me that she developed what she described as ‘a really good relationship’ with her brother, having visited him regularly, as her mother had told her before she died that “he needs his family”. It was for this reason that with his release pending that
Marie had offered to allow him to live with her and her partner in a ‘family environment’, once he was released. Marie asserted that she felt this was what her mother had ‘wanted’ and that she agreed, stating:

Everybody deserves a second chance.

I had noted how Marie’s story had been one of the many chances that she had given the men in her life and that she made little attempt made to justify, like other women I had interviewed, why she would stay in such abusive relationships. She had described her first relationship with Jai, an Asian man who ‘kicked’ and ‘punched’ her in the stomach when she was ‘six months pregnant’ causing her to lose their child. He ‘beat’ her to ‘go on the game’ - her story revealed that she had given him another chance. She had described her first husband as a ‘mummy’s boy’ who had ‘punched her whilst her mother-in law just watched - her story revealed that she had given him another chance. She had described her second husband who had ‘cheated’ on her ‘with a prostitute’, she was ‘hurt’ - her story revealed that she had given him another chance. She had described another relationship with a man who was not ‘violent’, despite the ‘couple of’ drunken slaps, that had ‘never marked’ - her story revealed that she had given him another chance. She had described the endless beatings by her third husband, the ‘numerous’ calls to the police - she had described how despite the abuse they ‘got married’.

Whilst some people might struggle to comprehend why a woman would stay in such damaging relationships, an interpretatively driven understanding could provide some insight. The importance to Marie of maintaining the idea that ‘everyone deserves a second chance’ is significant. Just how important is evidenced in her retelling of an exchange with her father about her brother coming to live with her upon his release from a high security hospital:

I always thought that was what my mum wanted, for him to come home and be in the family environment. But apparently my dad said “no that’s not what she wanted, she knew he would never get released.” But he did get released.
In this account, Marie removed herself as the first hand recipient of the conversation with her father - ‘But apparently my dad said ‘no that’s not what she wanted’’ - presenting it, instead, as hearsay. It is suggested that Marie’s removal of ‘self’ from this re-telling of the conversation is indicative of the painful reality that she was guarding herself from. Despite speaking of the degrading disempowerment she had experienced as a result of being raped by her brother when she was growing up, Marie had adhered to a ‘second chance’ discourse. The notion that being part of a family that stayed together was ideal exposed her to risk of re-victimisation that made her very fearful. Nonetheless, this was a position that guarded Marie from an alternative more painful reality - that ‘everyone’ may not always be deserving of a ‘second chance’. After all this would leave Marie vulnerable not only to the realisation that her brother was afforded too many chances to rape the females in his home, but also, to the idea that she may not be deserving of the chances that her ‘very nice’ non-violent partner had given her after she had abused him.

**Alina’s pen portrait**

Alina was a thirty seven year old British woman, first generation Pakistani, who I met through a probation service. Whilst an attractive woman, she had, what I would describe as, ‘hard’ features and piercing eyes accentuated by heavy black eyeliner. A ‘harsh’ image that I was to discover matched her ‘harsh’ life experience.

**Alina’s experiences growing up**

Alina described her parents’ relationship as ‘great’: she had ‘never even seen’ them ‘argue’. Her parents had had an arranged marriage and were cousins. She said her mum was a ‘housewife’ and her dad would go out to work. Alina had two sisters and a brother. She said that because her sisters met men for themselves who were Pakistani, they were allowed to marry them. She told me that she was
forced into what she described as an ‘arranged marriage’ at seventeen, because her mum had discovered that she had a boyfriend whom she been seeing for three years. Alina’s parents felt that because the man that she was seeing was Indian and not Pakistani, she had ‘put shame on the family’. Alina’s parents then took her to Pakistan, telling her that her ‘nan’ was ill, when in fact it was to marry a man that she saw for the first time on her wedding day. She stated that her parents had ‘got me, basically where they wanted me’. Alina’s parents took her passport and would not allow her to return to the United Kingdom until she had married. She told me ‘I just felt like he was forcing himself on me and I just … but I felt I had no other choice, if I wanted to come back to this country, that was my only way out’ - revealing that she had felt forced to have sex with this man who she did not know, as it was the only way she could envisage returning home to the United Kingdom.

Alina did return to the United Kingdom and ‘about four months, five months’ later her husband came over. She said she ‘learned to love him’. Alina told me that her mum was now dead, but that her father was alive and that when she sees him he always says “I’m sorry” for forcing her into the abusive marriage. She spoke of the regret that she could not have had a marriage to someone who treated her well.

…if I’d got those two relationships like my sisters, they worship the ground they walk on. And I think, you know, they forced me to get married to somebody I didn’t want to get married to and look what situation I’m in now.

**Alina’s adult experiences of domestic abuse**

Alina’s husband proved to be a very abusive man. Within ‘within three months of being married to him he’ had given her ‘a black eye because’ she was ‘twenty minutes late coming home’. Though he himself had many other women, he became paranoid about Alina’s fidelity to the extent that ‘any little thing would’ start him off

He put me in hospital. He knocked me unconsciousness. He fractured my ribs on three different occasions. He fractured a
nerve in my face, I have no feeling to one side of my face, and I've got seven children as well, so, yeah, there was a lot of domestic violence.

Alina’s account revealed that having ‘seven children’ with her husband had been forced on her and that she considered this rape of her to be part of the ‘domestic violence’ that she had endured. Alina revealed that she had also been forced into a life of drug taking and drug dealing. She said her husband would ‘sell heroin’ and that eventually she became a heroin addict and did serve a drugs related prison sentence during that marriage. She described how her husband had an ‘eight grand’ shed at the bottom of the garden, in which he kept ‘fighting chickens’ and would have his friends over to smoke heroin. She said that she was never allowed to go out further than the ‘garden’. On one occasion, Alina’s husband had burnt her with cooking fat on her arm and she had to go to hospital. He also beat her so badly during one pregnancy that the baby was born prematurely. She made ‘stupid excuses’ about what had happened, explaining ‘you always think you can try to change them and you never change them because if they hit you once they will always hit you’. And she was in no doubt that it was only luck that stopped her husband from killing her:

I remember we was arguing and then waking up on the sofa, he’d jumped on my head three times and when I’d come round my nose was bleeding, my ear was bleeding and my mouth was bleeding. And he left me in the house unconscious with the kids and legged it… When I came round he had picked me off the floor, when my son, basically my son said to me “he was standing over you crying trying to wake you up and he couldn’t and then he picked you up and put you on the sofa and put your mobile phone next to you”. And he rang a taxi in this process, got dressed and left me there with the kids. I had forty two missed calls when I come round. I felt like a bus had hit me.

Following this assault Alina’s husband refused to let her go to the hospital. Alina did tell her mother about the abuse but her mother offered no support, insisting
“you’ve been married into that house, your body should come out of that house and whatever happens behind closed doors needs to stay behind”.

Alina said that she never rang the police when he had hurt her, but that on occasions the neighbours had: ‘Basically they came and got involved, otherwise I’d had that many fights with him, it was funny’. Alina said that her husband’s mother would say to her “if you stayed quiet he wouldn’t hit you”, but then he also beat his mother too. Alina said that there had been times she would be protecting her mother-in-law from her husband, but then she would turn on her. When Alina left her forced marriage, she had met a man called Nick, who was another parent at her children’s school. She ‘thought he was genuinely a nice person’ but was to discover ‘the whole thing was a lie’. Not only was her second partner married, but he was also a ‘racist’ who tried to tell her that her sons ‘weren’t the right colour to play in the park’. Alina described that saying that to her children was ‘the worst mistake he could ever make’. She said:

So when I went round there and he said what he said I just lost the plot at that point.

She told me that although she had not intended to go round to his house ‘to fight with him’, when she got there her partner began shouting ‘Paki’ and ‘nigger’ at her:

I think all the anger that I had I’d basically, Nick got it, Nick had, he just … because he… right, I pushed him back in the house and he grabbed me by the hair and he tried to swing me round and I just lost it then, I had the shovel, he had six stitches to the back of his head. I could’ve killed him. That’s how I felt at the time. I would’ve killed … if the police hadn’t come I would’ve killed him.

Alina acknowledged that because of ‘everything that I had gone through over that many years he basically got the brunt of it’. She described how her ex-partner who had got back with his wife, got her ‘arrested’ for breaching a ‘two year restraining order’ that prevented her having contact with him. Alina told me that he made false ‘allegations’ about her, resulting in her having been ‘arrested since Christmas eight times’. Alina spoke of not being able to ‘even walk in the area’ as he had accused
her of having ‘jumped on the bonnet’ of his car. In turn, she attacked him and threatened to get some other men to assault him unless he dropped the charges. Despite having been briefly imprisoned for her assaults on her ex-partner, Alina expressed that she still wanted to ‘punch’ his ‘fat fucking face in’. Alina said that because of the heroin and the assault on her ex-partner, her eight children had been taken into care, but that she was now ‘clean’ and working with the authorities to get her children back with her.

Analysis

Alina’s account contained two dominant themes which I address in turn: (1) My path to violence; (2) He was a ‘racist’. In what follows I show how Alina explained that her life of victimisation had led her to become a violent ‘monster’ towards an ex-partner. I also show that through the he was a racist discourse, Alina attempted to guard herself from the painful reality that the anger she felt towards her ‘racist’ ex-partner, was in part rooted in the unresolved anger that she felt towards her racist parents.

My path to violence

Whilst Alina’s account of her parents’ marriage was one of a ‘great’ arrangement between cousins and free of arguments, by contrast her own marriage was forced and violent. Alina had spoken of how as a result of her parents finding out when she was seventeen that she had been ‘seeing’ an ‘Indian’ boy for ‘three years’, to avoid the ‘shame’ she had been taken to Pakistan and forced to marry a man of her own race. Being ‘forced’ to have sex on their wedding night for fear of never being allowed to return home to the United Kingdom, was just the start of the violence that Alina was to experience throughout the twenty year marriage. She had described her husband as a ‘schizophrenic’ heroin dealer whom she said she ‘learned to love’, even though he had given her black eyes, burnt her, beaten and ‘jumped on’ her, turned her into a heroin addict and forced her to have seven
children by him. Alina had spoken of how she had started to resist the abuse from her husband, having what she described ‘punch-ups’ with him and scaring him by telling him not to ‘go to sleep’ because she would ‘end up killing’ him.

Alina had recalled telling her mother what she was going through in her marriage, but that her mother’s response had been to tell her “your body should come out of that house” as “whatever happens behind closed doors needs to stay behind”. It was only after her mother’s death that Alina’s father had expressed to her how “sorry” he was for having forced her to marry such an abusive man. Alina herself had described to me the regret that she felt that she was not allowed to marry the man she had chosen and that she had not had the opportunity to enjoy the kind of marriages her two sisters had with men that ‘worship’ them. She had expressed resentment that her parents had ‘forced’ her to marry a man who she ‘didn’t want to get married to’, stating - ‘look what situation I’m in now’. It was only when her mother had died that Alina ignored her warning to stay in the marriage, irrespective of her suffering, and left her husband. Whilst Alina had described herself as having been turned ‘into some kind of monster’ as a result of her violent experiences, she had rejected the idea that she was innately ‘bad’, by presenting her violent history as a path that had led her to violence.

**The ‘racist’**

Alina had described how, after exiting her abusive marriage, she had a brief relationship with a man called Nick, whose children went to school with some of her children. Alina said that ‘the whole thing was a lie’ because she discovered that he was married. From the offset, Alina had made her disdain for this man very clear. She had described him as ‘a lying, scheming rat’ and ‘a nasty, nasty person’ and recalled how as a result of his being ‘racist’ towards her children she gone to his house and put ‘six stiches’ in his ‘head’ with a ‘shovel’. What was evident from Alina’s account was the anger that she felt towards this man and I noted during the interview the almost ‘venomous’ tone she developed when she spoke of him. Alina’s anger had led to her being ‘arrested’ ‘eight times’ and not being allowed to
‘walk in the area’ where Nick and his wife lived due to their accusations that she had threatened them. Alina had said that because of her attack on Nick and the heroin (which suggested that she was still an addict), that she had lost six of her children to the care system. Whilst Alina had told me that she had got ‘clean’ of drugs and was working to get her children back, her feelings of anger were clearly unresolved, as even on the day that we met she still expressed that she wanted to ‘punch his fat fucking face in’.

Alina had suggested that she had become ‘some kind of monster’ and made the connection between her feelings of anger towards this man and the twenty years of victimisation that she had suffered during her marriage. Whilst Alina had told me, ‘I think all the anger that I had I’d basically, Nick got it’ (meaning she transferred anger towards her husband), her next ‘stutter’ suggested that she felt that Nick had in her view deserved it, ‘Nick had, he just … because he’. Alina went on to state that ‘if he hadn’t been racist’, which was ‘the worst mistake he could ever make’, she would not have tried to kill him. This revealed that racism and not domestic abuse was the ‘cause’ of the anger Alina felt.

Read simply, this was a story of a victimised woman venting her hurt and anger as she encounters yet another abusive man. However, perhaps one should not ignore the relevance of the ‘trigger’ for Alina’s violence. It is suggested that for Alina being ‘hurt’ as a result of racism was significant. After all it was racism that had meant she was unable to marry her boyfriend because he was not the right race, and instead she was forced into a violent marriage. Whilst Alina had spoken of projecting the anger she felt towards her ex-husband onto Nick, perhaps there was another reality too painful for her to acknowledge. That reality being the anger she had projected onto Nick was not anger she had felt towards her violent ex-husband, but more likely in part, the unresolved anger she had felt towards her racist parents. Parents who had prevented her from marrying the man she loved and forced her to marry and stay married to an abusive man, regardless of her suffering.
Conclusion

All the women had framed their perpetration of violence/abuse as being the end result of the suffering they had endured as victims. This victimisation had set them on paths towards offending: killing (Jane); aggression (Marie); and violence (Alina). By providing this discursive context for their actions, the women had attempted to mitigate their aggression, rejecting the idea that they were innately ‘bad’, and presenting themselves as driven to behave in socially unacceptable ways because of significant histories of victimisation (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009).

This, however, was not the whole story, as my psychosocial interpretations showed, the somewhat incoherent and contradictory elements of the women’s stories revealed emotional truths that were not so readily relayed. Jane, despite having spoken of her day to day experience as one of pain and abuse, had also described her life as ‘lovely’. Vulnerable to the shame and disempowerment of victimisation, Jane’s depiction of ‘a lovely life’ was her attempt to guard against the painful reality of the life she had lived.

Marie, despite speaking of the degrading disempowerment she had experienced as a result of being raped by her brother when she was growing up, had adhered to a ‘second chance’ discourse, though it was clear that this had exposed her to significant fear and risk of re-victimisation. This ‘second chance’ ethos had been her mother’s justification for encouraging her to let her brother back into her life. It was now a source of doubt and vulnerability for Marie, as she considered not only why her brother had been afforded so many ‘chances’ to rape her, but also whether she was genuinely deserving of the chances that her ‘very nice’, non-violent partner had given her after she had abused him.

Alina had spoken ‘venomously’ of her ‘racist’ ex-partner. The fact that being the victim of racism would make Alina angry is undisputed, however it was clear that being ‘hurt’ as a result of racism had stirred feelings in Alina she struggled to fully comprehend. Whilst she had spoken of having transferred her unresolved feelings of anger that she felt for her violent ex-husband onto this ‘racist’ ex-partner, her
account had revealed her husband’s abuse to be only one source of her anger. It is suggested Alina guarded herself from the painful reality that her anger at being the victim of racism was in part rooted in her experience of racist victimisation by her parents, who had forced her to stay married to a man of the ‘right’ race despite his abuse of her.

This interpretatively driven analysis has offered insight into the unresolved feelings and psychological conflicts that the women struggled to speak of: feelings of disappointment, disempowerment, degradation, self-loathing, anger and culpability. As with the men’s stories (see Chapter 5), the incoherence and contradiction to be found in the women’s stories should not be viewed as evidencing deceit, but instead read as their attempts to guard against painful feelings that could not always be framed in socially acceptable ways consistent with gendered expectations of femininity.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

To conclude this thesis I start by providing an overview of the core argument within each chapter. I then return to considering two overriding questions: Firstly, what does this research tell us about the relevance of gender in relationships where it is the male partner who is the victim? Secondly, is there domestic violence without ‘male power’? The chapter ends by considering the implications of my findings for policymakers, service providers, and academics.

I opened Chapter 1, by noting how stories about men ‘battered’ by their wives have become a standard filler item in many of the national tabloids over the last two decades. The source of these stories is often men’s rights groups that campaign for the plight of male victims of abuse (Abused Men in Scotland; Mankind). I outlined the polarised debate that had emerged during this period, between on the one hand, those arguing perpetration symmetry between men and women and the irrelevance of gender in the study of domestic abuse (Straus, 1974, 1979, 2010; Straus et al, 1996, 2003, 2012; Anderson, 2005), and on the other hand, those who argue perpetration asymmetry, insisting that domestic abuse remains an expression of patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979, 2004). Accepting that some men have been victimised by partners/ex-partners, it was this polarised debate that fuelled my desire to understand how power is implicated in relationships where it is the woman who is the abuser and the man is the victim.

I started Chapter 2 by providing my conceptualisation of the relevance of power and gender to understanding abusive relationships. Utilising Connell’s concept of ‘gender order’, I provided a theoretical framework that enables us to imagine a more nuanced construction of gender identity and the hierarchical differences that exist amongst men and women (Connell, 1987, 2005). Drawing on the contemporary work of Jody Miller (2008) and Catherine Donovan, Rebecca Barnes and Catherine Nixon (2014), I considered the complex way that power can
be implicated in abusive relationships. Specifically, exploring how gender can intersect with other social inequalities such as class, age, race and education, as well as less ‘obvious’ power dynamics like sexual experience, or a good peer network that Donovan and her colleagues (2014) termed ‘social and cultural ‘capital” (2014: 26). Having recognised the relevance of gender to any study of domestic abuse, the chapter then addressed the gender symmetry/asymmetry debate testing the claims made by groups campaigning for men’s rights (Abused Men in Scotland; ManKind) against the empirical evidence, presented in both the academic literature and practitioner accounts. This illuminated how, despite assertions of family violence theorists (Straus, 1979, 2010; Straus & Gelles, 1986), men’s and women’s experiences of abuse are different, with women experiencing greater rates and severity of abuse with more significant impact (Johnson, 1995, 2005, 2006, 2008; Johnson & Kelly; 2008; Gadd et al, 2002, 2003; Stark, 2007, 2013; Hester, 2009; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Lombard, 2010; Barter & McCarry, 2009). The chapter then turned its attention to exploring women’s involvement in crime and women’s perpetration of domestic abuse. I considered how, despite considerable academic evidence disproving it (Carlen, 1988; Steffensmeier et al, 2005; Worrall, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Brown, 1986; Heimer et al, 2009; Sharpe, 2009), the claim that equality for women has resulted in a convergence in men’s and women’s rates of violence (Adler & Adler, 1975) had given rise to repeated 21st century media representations to the contrary (Jewkes, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Ringrose, 2006; Young, 2009). I concluded the chapter by arguing that an interpretively driven analysis allows for a more complex understanding of how gender and power are implicated in abusive relationships. Such an analysis can illuminate how power is patterned by gender, but not absolutely. Thus, the polarised symmetry/asymmetry debate can be transcended without abandoning an understanding of the significant role gender plays in the aetiology of domestic abuse.

In Chapter 3 I provided an overview of the FANI method adopted in this research and the ethical and practical considerations involved in using it. I also provided an overview of the two methods of analysis used - psycho-discursive (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1997, 1999) (adopted in Chapters 4 and 6) and psychosocial
(Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) (adopted in Chapters 5 and 7). I concluded Chapter 3 by outlining how I learnt to apply the principles of the Free Association Narrative Interview Method, reflecting on the difficulties I had remaining responsive to some participants’ accounts. This evidenced the reflexive learning that undertaking this PhD entailed.

Having explored recent developments in the theorisation of masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1993, 2012, 2014) and presented the psycho-discursive research of Wetherell and Edley (1997, 1999), I posed two questions in Chapter 4: (1) In what ways are abused men’s accounts shaped by gender? And (2), what is the relationship between masculinity and abuse for abused men? In an attempt to answer these questions I carried out a psycho-discursive analysis of the accounts of ten men presenting as victims of domestic abuse. This revealed how the men adopted one or more discursive positions i.e. Endurance; Chivalry; Managing ‘crazy women’; Physical competence and accountable/dangerous men; The ‘new man’ and ‘hands on’ fathering. Through these discourses the men presented their endurance of abuse from women as testament to their self-sacrificing heroism. Most men adhered to the paternalistic idea that women, as the frailer sex, were not to be feared, but were instead in need of male protection. They felt that women should expect to be put in their place (which, it was implied, would be easy). Some men presented themselves as rescuing damaged, vulnerable and unpredictable women from the harm they might cause themselves, or others. When these women could not be made to see reason they were constructed as crazed, sick, dangerous and poisonous ‘Medusas’. Hence, the men’s investments in modes of masculinity that positioned them as ‘protectors of women’ went unchallenged, even though they had sometimes behaved abusively towards their partners. For some men, taking on the role of primary carer of their children meant that they had forgone masculine entitlements. They viewed fatherhood as a role alien to them, but one that they believed came naturally to women, speaking of their attempts to regain their masculinity by re-engaging with ‘manly’ pursuits, such as sport and work. In these ways male victims rejected disempowering representations of victimisation. They positioned themselves as brave and enduring heroes whose fathering and gallantry demonstrated a strength
of character, unlike ‘other’ weaker less principled men, who would retaliate with violence towards women who stepped ‘out of line’. Male victims’ accounts of being threatened by ‘crazy’ women, were a stark contrast to their accounts of courage and physical competence when faced with conflict from dangerous men. Talk of passivity during instances of conflict with women was delivered alongside talk of physical competence when confronted by accountable/dangerous men. The fair fight discourse is a powerful one for men, and one that can be used to signify strength of character alongside bodily strength. Recognising the vulnerability of a female assailant as an unfair fight was one way in which male victims justified taking control of ‘crazy’, unpredictable women, representing their interventions as a form of heroism. I concluded the chapter by acknowledging the experiential relevance of gender for the men who consider themselves to be victims, as other commentators who similarly deconstruct the relevance of gender amidst a general, but not absolute pattern of sexual difference (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009). Whilst the gender order is persisting and pervasive, a more complex understanding of power dynamics than that offered by early feminist analysis of patriarchy is now needed. Gender is relevant in terms of the way that men are able to speak of their experiences of abuse. Hidden behind attempts to buy back into heroic ‘masculine ideals’, are struggles, on the one hand, to reconcile what it means to be a man with feelings of hurt, disappointment and unfulfilled expectations and pain, sometimes stemming from childhood experiences of abuse.

Chapter 4 had revealed that abused men’s accounts are shaped by gendered portrayals of sacrifice and heroism. However, the constraints of this gendered discourse failed to illuminate the complex ways that subjectivities can dictate which positions empower and which leave an individual vulnerable to unresolved ‘pain’. For this reason, in Chapter 5, I carried out a psychosocial analysis of the accounts of three men presenting as victims (Jim, Ean and Gary). This interpretive method allowed me to look behind the words spoken. Through an exploration of the contradictory elements of the men’s accounts, their attempts to guard against painful realities were revealed, not least their thwarted sense of entitlement in terms of women’s loyalty and care and their confused understanding of the
boundaries between discipline/protection and love/control. For Jim, Ean and Gary, the notably patriarchal ‘worlds’ in which they had watched their fathers enjoy loyal intimate relationships, bore little resemblance to the worlds in which they found themselves navigating intimacies. These men struggled to ‘grapple’ with such generational change. Concealed behind discourses of endurance, protectionism and heroic overcoming was a sense of victimisation symptomatic, not only of abuse that their partners had levied on them, but of unresolved feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, failure and isolation stemming from an inability to negotiate or sustain intimacy. The chapter showed the relationship between masculinity and abuse for the abused men to be a complex one, marked by emotional ‘pain’, complexly woven between the uniquely biographical experience of failed relationships and the more general social experience of inhabiting a gendered order patterned by patriarchal expectations that are no longer so realisable. Ultimately, the men’s often contradictory accounts exposed guarded struggles to avoid pain and negotiate intimacy amidst class and culturally tinged expectations of how real men should behave.

Chapter 6 explored the limited discursive options open to female perpetrators. This chapter presented the psycho-discursive analysis of ten female perpetrators of domestic abuse. Two questions were addressed: (1) What is the relationship between femininity and abuse for female perpetrators? And (2), in what ways are female perpetrators’ accounts shaped by gender? I illustrated how the social unacceptability of female aggression left women who have been abusive with limited ways of accounting for their behaviour, adopting one or more of three discursive frameworks for their experiences i.e. Victimised and damaged; Resilient and protective; Vengeful and seeking reprisal. The women who engaged in the victimised and damaged discourse linked their own perpetration to the psychological harm that they had sustained as a result of their historical experiences of victimisation (Motz, 2008; Conradi et al, 2009). These women rejected the idea that they were born ‘bad’, or ‘mad’, but instead claimed to be driven to lose their senses (Ussher, 1991: 172) by the severe and sustained violence, coercion and control that they had suffered (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013). Women, who had spoken of being resilient and protective of
themselves, and/or their children, were aggressive in response to their own victimisation (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Muftic et al, 2007; Blair-Merritt, 2010). Theirs was a discourse of resistance and survival through which they rejected the ‘undesirable connotations’ of being a ‘damaged, passive, and powerless’ victim (Best, 1997: 13). They spoke of being empowered, not just when they were preparing to leave an abusive relationship (Mahoney, 1994) but at all stages i.e. the beginning, middle and end. Some women had positioned themselves as *vengeful and seeking reprisal*. These were women who presented themselves as having had enough of men’s cruelty and/or deceitfulness and were no longer willing to tolerate it. I concluded the chapter by showing how women’s use of certain discourses reflects the limited range of options with regard to how they can depict their violence. These women were ‘stuck between a rock and a hard place’, ‘forced’ to adopt the position of victim which, by its very nature, is disempowering, or admit to being perpetrators of violence and hence ‘failed’ women, mothers and wives. Whilst the women rejected helplessness through talk of survival, the ‘pains’ of abuse did not leave them: pain stemming from childhood experiences, such as being left alone, dirty and hungry whilst parents drank in the pub, watching parents ‘fight’, mothers raped and being sexually assaulted by family members, or other adults in positions of trust. This ‘pain’ was compounded in adulthood through similarly fearful and degrading experiences. Hence, they tried to ‘fit’ their stories within conventionally gendered discourses while attempting to avoid the shame and stigma destructive and abusive intimate relationships inflicted on them.

The need for a methodological approach that explored, not only what the women had to say, but also unspeakable fears, anxieties, insecurities, motivations, and desires was addressed in Chapter 7. In this chapter I carried out a psychosocial analysis of the accounts of three women who presented as perpetrators (Jane, Marie and Alina). All three women framed their perpetration as being the end result of the suffering they had endured as victims. This victimisation had, they claimed, sent them on paths towards, killing (Jane); aggression (Marie); violence (Alina). Their victimisation was presented as mitigation for their perpetration and ‘proof’ that they were not innately ‘bad’ but driven to their abusive acts (Motz,
This, however, was not the whole story, as my psychosocial interpretations showed the women’s denial of ‘pain’ stemmed not least from their unfulfilled expectations of ‘lovely’ domestication lost in their lived reality of dysfunctional failed, or failing family life. The psycho-social analyses of Jane, Marie and Alina’s accounts had revealed that the incoherence and contradiction present in female perpetrators’ accounts (as was the case with the male victim’s accounts in Chapter 4) should not be viewed as necessarily evidencing deceit – as men’s rights groups tend to construe it - but instead as attempts to guard against painful feelings and behaviour rendered shameful in the context of ideals of femininity. Hence, the women’s ability to acknowledge their feelings of shame and anger, was made all the more difficult by the limited range of socially acceptable ways women can speak of behaving aggressively towards men. Such accounts are also therefore representations that are highly constrained by gender, as well as the tragic and terrible lives lived by their tellers.

What does this research tell us about the relevance of gender?

Differential experiences

This research has drawn on and consolidates earlier research that identifies that men and women use and experience domestic abuse differently (Gadd et al, 2002; Johnson, 2005; Stark, 2007; Hester, 2009). It is known that the rate and the severity of abuse against women is greater than that against men (Gadd et al, 2002, 2003; Hester, 2009) and that its impact is most keenly experienced by women and girls (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Lombard, 2010; Barter & McCarr, 2013). We know that some female victims have significant histories of sustained violence, coercion and control (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009; Stark, 2013). However, the men in this study did not reveal such patterns of abuse. On the contrary, their accounts of victimisation in their adult relationships revealed stories of control and confusing revelations about retaliation, equal combat, or even primary instigation, framed typically, in terms of endurance and heroism (Gadd et al, 2002; Hester, 2009). They spoke of holding their partners’ arms and
straddling their partners on the ground, with little acknowledgement made to how intimidating such actions might be. They were keen to assure that their attempts to control through restraint were necessary to protect vulnerable and damaged women, who were out of control, from harming themselves and/or those around them.

Childhood experiences of abuse also paint a gendered picture, when we compare the revelations of the male victims with those of the female perpetrators. Whilst the extent of experiences of non-sexual abuse was similar for the men (four) and women (five), differences become apparent when we consider abuse of a sexual nature. The most notable distinction between the men’s and women’s experiences of sexual abuse, was that whilst no men had been subjected to incestuous abuse by a close family member (parent/s; step-parent/s; sibling/s; grandparent/s), half of the women had (for a table of women’s and men’s accounts of abuse in childhood by type see Appendix E and Appendix F). Furthermore, the coercive and controlling nature (Stark, 2007, 2013) of the women’s experiences was also apparent, none more so than in Amy’s account of feeling ‘worthless’ as a result of her partner checking her ‘knickers’ were not ‘fancy’ before she left the house.

**Differential impact and fear**

For the women who had presented as perpetrators, the impact of the abuse that they themselves had suffered was far reaching. They made the connection between their significant histories of victimisation and their own abusive acts. These women cited historical abuse as having caused them to lose their senses (Ussher, 1991), having a ‘split personality’, or a ‘traumatised’ mind testament to their unbearable lives of abuse. Undoubtedly the women’s experiences of sexual abuse are in part responsible for their feelings of vulnerability and fear when confronted with male aggression and control. The majority of men I spoke to did not speak of being afraid. Some men even portrayed their conflicts as laughable. Much like the boys in Barter and McCarry’s (2009) cohort, who found girls’ abusive acts ‘funny’ (Barter & McCarry, 2013: 107), some men described being threatened
with a knife, or being hit over the head with a ‘spanner’, ‘a cabbage’ or a ‘phone’, as ‘funny’. For the three men who did speak of fear, theirs were accounts of battling women who were not ‘normal’ and therefore not deserving of chivalry. Hence, acts of restraint and/or aggression towards these crazed, sick, dangerous and poisonous women were ‘understandable’ and did not challenge the men’s investments in the protector of women discourse.

**Gendered perspectives on loss**

Differential perspectives of loss between women and men were apparent. Loss was candidly spoken of by the women presenting as perpetrators. Many talked of the pain of losing their child/children as a result of leaving them behind when they exited abusive relationships, or having a child/children removed from their care as a result of staying in a relationships marked by violence. The women also conveyed a sense of loss that their relationships had not lived up to their expectations. Despite their own experiences, growing up, of family life bearing no resemblance to such ideals - they wanted the ‘nice house’, ‘family’ time, the walks in the park, or the baking of cakes together. Instead they found themselves, at best, with partners that did not help around the house, stayed in, smoked ‘weed’ and played computer games and, at worst, with partners that beat them and forced them into prostitution.

The men articulated loss in terms of thwarted masculine expectation. They described how for them child care had meant the loss of male identity, as they could no longer enjoy materialistic symbols of masculinity like the ‘nice sports car’, or the ‘silly amount of money’, nor did they have the freedom to engage in masculine pastimes like sport, going to the pub or ‘ripping down engines’. This change of lifestyle was expressed as a burden imposed on them by inadequate women, to whom child care should have come naturally. However, underlying their investment in gendered talk of heroically holding and retraining crazy women to protect them from harming themselves, or others, was the fear that if they let go their partner would leave. For these men their most significant fear was the loss of ‘love’. Being left alone was frightening, not least because they would have to
explain to themselves and others why they had not commanded the care, loyalty and respect of women that they believed ‘real’ men should, and their fathers had. It was this exposure of emotional vulnerabilities that furnished a sense of victimisation. Whilst the men articulated feelings of hurt and betrayal, their adherence to gendered discourses denied feelings of dependency. Ultimately the men’s accounts of abuse revealed their struggle to negotiate their gendered expectation and the shifting dynamics of power that exist in failed and failing relationships.

Is there domestic violence without ‘male power’?

I have faced the inevitable barriers in terms of gathering and analysing data that anyone tasked with interpreting and understanding other’s narratives would experience, as the process is closely tied up one’s position as a researcher. Whilst it is accepted that absolute objectivity is unrealistic (Harding, 1991; Oleson, 2000), the processes of consideration and reflexivity that I employed throughout this study has helped to alert me to a possible ‘misreading’ and ‘strengthen’ my ‘theoretical conviction’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 67). Although the findings of the small sample of individuals’ interviewed cannot assume to ‘speak’ for everyone with certainty, tentative generalisations can be made in terms of the complex dynamics of power that exist in relationships where men experience domestic abuse: dynamics that the concept of patriarchy does not adequately explain. Whilst the significant role that gender plays in the aetiology of violence in terms of experience and impact cannot be ignored, the infinitely varied manifestations and experiences of power that exist should also be acknowledged. The accounts of the individuals I interviewed illuminate the patterned configurations of how power might be present in both the enactment of violence and in its telling in the aftermath of conflict. This complexity is born out of the multiple ways that gender is intersected with other structural hierarchies, as well as individual biography, to create context specific configurations of power.

The men I spoke to had grown up witnessing their fathers benefit from a ‘world’ in which male authority and female loyalty were the ‘norm’. Yet they found
themselves negotiating conflictual relationships whilst inhabiting a gendered order patterned by patriarchal expectations that are no longer realisable. The confusion and insecurity this evoked, along with unique experiences of emotional pain furnished their sense of vulnerability.

For the women I spoke to, the complexly woven relevance of biography and social structure was also evident. The structural inequality that the women faced was compounded by the pains of growing up in neglectful and/or abusive homes, or foster care. As a result, these were women with limited support networks and little social or cultural ‘capital’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 25) with which to negotiate adult relationships. For some of the women I spoke to, their partner’s knowledge of intimate information about their past was an opportunity to exploit. Taunts and jibes by partners about the women’s experiences of sexual victimisation, particularly incest, were used to humiliate. Much like the threat of being ‘outed’ experienced by gay men and lesbian women (Ristock, 2002), the threat of disclosure of past abuse evoked upset and fear and, for some, provoked an angry response. Whilst one might not expect these women to forge positions of strength at times of conflict, the validity of the understanding that we should not rely on the ‘obvious’ ‘assumptions’ (Donovan et al, 2014: 25) regarding the primary power dynamics operating within relationships, is evidenced by the women’s accounts. In the aftermath of conflict, complex power dynamics can be brought sharply into focus for those involved. One partner might focus on reparation; another might ‘walk on egg shells’ afraid to speak their mind; another might plan to leave a situation in which they feel unsafe or trapped. As power plays ensue, small changes, like the night out with the ‘boys’/‘girls’, or the new job can become deeply symbolic of the wider malaise. For the women I spoke to, change brought with it opportunities for empowerment when previously they were powerless. Changes, such as pregnancy and knowing who fathered their child, provided opportunity for maintaining control by refusing to confirm paternity to partners/ex-partners. Such shifting relationship dynamics offer support for the understanding that power does not necessarily permanently reside with one party (Ristock, 2002) and can shift between partners within the term of a relationship. It is also revealed how some women, having been victimised in previous relationships, can then
perpetrate abuse in subsequent relationships in response to feelings of vulnerability.

Ultimately, this research has shown the intimate and diffused patterns of power that operate within abusive relationships, yet it is in the gender specific discursive positioning of individuals that we can, most clearly, see male power at ‘work’. Both men and women have difficulty articulating and making sense of their vulnerabilities because their personal ‘stories’ do not ‘fit’ with the dominant public ‘story’ of abuse. For the men, the fear and pain surrounding thwarted love and failed expectations went unspoken amidst the pervasive understanding of male strength and resilience. Whilst for the women, feelings of anger, vengeance, or desire for control, could not easily be expressed as the social unacceptability of female aggression left them in the ‘silent vacuum’ also experienced by many lesbian women (Barnes, 2010: 233). Consequently, it is not only the victim who feels a sense of victimisation. Nor is it that such feelings are simply a product of what happened. Accounts are both performative and informative of the teller, constrained and guarded, ‘realities’, told, rehearsed and re-told in limitless ways dependent upon the context and audience. Whilst such performances illustrate how male power is implicated in generating identities and practices, the understanding that discursive power can be both contested and transformed (Connell, 2009) does offer hope for positive change.

Policy implications

So how can those tasked with supporting those who present as male victims and female perpetrators of domestic abuse bring about positive change? Taking this understanding forward it is paramount that policymakers, service providers, academics and academic commentators alike, move beyond the polarised debate. This does not mean abandoning analyses of the role of gender and power in domestic abuse, but recognising the complex ways in which they present themselves in both the enactment of violence and in its telling in the aftermath of conflict. It must be recognised that we cannot hope to truly understand what is
going on in abusive relationships from data that merely quantifies the dynamic. Nor can we assume that individual perpetrators’ or victims’ depictions of their experiences ever fully capture the whole ‘truth’. My research clearly demonstrates that professionals tasked with meeting the needs of individuals experiencing abusive relationships, need to be aware of the imperatives of presenting a defensible account of oneself and the over-layering of such accounts with gendered expectations. It is crucial that there is the provision of opportunities for both men presenting as victims and women presenting as perpetrators to tell their stories. It is important that practitioners, listening to accounts, are mindful of the complex possibilities, for example, the possibility that an individual who has inflicted harm on their partner/ex-partner feels a sense of victimisation, or the possibility that a victim may feel uncontrollable anger. Furthermore, it is imperative that the focus of practitioners is not just on behaviour, but instead on allowing, or helping individuals to tell, acknowledge and in turn address vulnerabilities: vulnerabilities that underscore their behaviour, such as thwarted expectation, unfulfilled entitlement, distrust and unhealthy attachments. Ultimately, it is this kind of support that will help them consider recasting their stories through discourses that enmesh less in the binaries of gender, patriarchal assumptions, or the stigma of having been abused, or an abuser.
References


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DOMESTIC ABUSE RESEARCH PROJECT
REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ABUSIVE IN A RELATIONSHIP?
HAS SOMEONE SUGGESTED THAT YOU HAVE BEEN?

Would you like to tell your story?

My name is Stephanie Alger and I am carrying out research at The University of Manchester into domestic abuse. I want to hear what men have to say about domestic abuse in relationships.

I am looking for **men, aged 16+**, to talk me in confidence about domestic abuse.

During the interview I will help you to talk about your experiences. You will not have to answer questions you do not want to.

All interviews are **confidential** and you will be interviewed twice, for about 60 minutes each time.

I would like to offer you £15, as a thank you for taking part and to cover any expenses.

If you are interested in taking part in my research study, or would like more information about it please feel free to contact me:

Steph Alger: 07535010561, email: Stephanie.alger@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
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Steph Alger: 07535010561, email: *Stephanie.alger@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk*
Appendix C

Domestic Abuse Research Participant Information

My name is Stephanie Alger, I am a PhD research student at The University of Manchester (The School of Law, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL). You are invited to take part in my study into the service needs of individuals affected by domestic abuse. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Here are some answers to questions you may want to ask;

What is the aim of the research?

This research, which is titled, *Inverting Assumptions: Domestic Abuse Without ‘Male Power’?* is particularly interested in looking at women who abuse their partners, or ex partners and male victims of domestic abuse. My aim is to establish the provisions that appropriately and effectively meet the needs of both the male victim and female perpetrator of domestic abuse and consider whether the present provisions are appropriate and effective.

Why have I been chosen?

You were chosen because you contacted a domestic service provider, who has also asked about 40 other individuals who have had contact with them, if they would take part in this research.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

You will be interviewed by me, privately in an office and I will help you to talk about your experiences of domestic abuse. There will be two, one hour long interviews, with approximately two weeks between each interview. These interviews will be
arranged for a date and time that suits you. You will be asked some questions, but mainly you will be free to talk to me about anything that is important to you. I recognise that you will be talking about matters that may cause you to feel uncomfortable or upset, but you can choose just to talk about the things that you are happy to share with me and you can stop the interview at any time. The interview will be audio recorded.

**What happens with my recorded interview?**

The interviews will be typed up (or transcribed) from the recordings. Then a summary of what has been said will be written, in order for research findings to be established and a report be made. The data will be securely stored and computers holding the research will be securely pass worded and only I will have access to it. Furthermore, it will be almost impossible for you to be identified, as your name will not be written anywhere on the recordings, or the transcript. As well as contributing to my PhD dissertation, the data that you have provided may appear in future publications. Again, you will not be named and will therefore remain anonymous. A copy of the research can be made available to all individuals who take part, should they want to know what has been written.

**What happens if I do not want to take part, or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, then change your mind, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

**Will I be paid for participating in the research?**

To show my appreciation for you giving up your time to take part, at the end of the second interview you will receive £15. This hopefully will cover any ‘out of pocket’ expenses.
How much time will I have to give up?

Your participation in the study will be two interviews, for one hour each (there will be a maximum of 2 weeks between interview one and interview two). You will therefore be taking part for a total of two hours.

Where will the research take place?

The research will be conducted in an office of the domestic abuse service provider, with whom you have had contact.

Will the outcome of the research be published?

Yes, the research will be published in both academic and policy publications. This will help people to have a better understanding of the experiences of both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Who do I contact for further information?

You should contact me, Stephanie Alger, on the e mail address, or telephone number below. I will be very happy to answer any questions that you want to ask;

Steph Alger mobile: 07535010561

Email: Stephanie.alger@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Alternatively, if you wish, I can contact you by telephone, on a specified day in the week and at a specified time, if you provide details below (note a call will only be made to you on the day and exact time specified);

Day in week………………………………………………………………………………………..

Time on that day…………………………………………………………………………………..

Contact phone number…………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for reading
What if something goes wrong?

If you want to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research, you should contact;

The Head of the Research Office, 
Christie Building, 
The University of Manchester, 
Oxford Road, 
Manchester, 
M13 9PL.
Appendix D

Inverting Assumptions: Domestic Abuse Without ‘Male Power’?

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

- I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet.
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and those questions were answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.
- I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers in an anonymised form.

Participant ___________________________ Date _____________ Signature ___________________________

Researcher ___________________________ Date _____________ Signature ___________________________
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<th>Bill</th>
<th>Mike</th>
<th>Ean</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>Jim</th>
<th>Matt</th>
<th>Ray</th>
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