"I couldn't move forward if I didn't look back": Visual Expression and Transitional Stories of Domestic Violence

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Acronyms

The following acronyms are used within this thesis:

AHRC: Arts and Humanities Research Council

BAAT: British Association of Art Therapists

BPS: British Psychological Society

BSA: British Sociological Association

HMIC: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

HMSO: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

MARACs: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

NHS: National Health Service, UK

ONS: Office of National Statistics

PAR: Participatory Action Research

PA: Participatory Arts

PTSD: Post-traumatic stress disorder

WHO: World Health Organization

WNC: Women's National Commission

Transcription Guide

An attempt has been made to maintain the original tone of the words spoken by participants, as much as is possible on the printed page. To facilitate this aim the following protocol is used in the presentation of participant's spoken words:

- All transcribed conversations are in *italics* and printed within double quotation marks.

- Names in **bold** indicate that another participant is starting to talk.

- Words within [ ] are my spoken words.

- An interruption is indicated by using ' / '.

- Pauses are indicted by using ' . ' The longer the pause the more ' . ' appear.

- Words that were not picked up well enough by recording equipment are shown as (indistinct), sometimes with a potential word given where this was possible to decipher.

- Where words might challenge anonymity, these are changed or removed, but with those changes made clear.

Abstract

Psychological, sociological and feminist models of understanding domestic violence have contributed to the development of interventions that seek to raise awareness, keep women safe, and help them to create new lives for themselves and their families. Research literature has extensively paid attention to the ways in which women both live with and move away from domestic violence, documenting how they employ strategies of survival and resistance. The research methods employed to investigate domestic violence includes a range of quantitative and qualitative methods with particular emphasis placed upon enabling women to tell their stories in as authentic a way as possible. This thesis adds to the literature by considering how women construct what will be referred to as *transitional stories of domestic violence,* within which they imagine their future selves and develop the means to become what they hope for.

The methodology used is original within the study of domestic violence in its synthesis of arts-based, feminist and participatory methods. The adopted epistemology sought to value the use of embodiment and imagination in the construction of knowledge, both of which are considered to be situated. The use of an arts-based method is chosen to enable a different way for women to tell their stories about their response to living with and transitioning away from domestic violence. The evaluation of this methodology shows that it is a valid form of enabling women to have the embodied subjectivity of their experiences and imagination witnessed in a way that complements the written and spoken word, whilst better allowing the physical and metaphorical quality of their stories to come to the foreground. Following a feminist agenda, attention is paid to the influence of gender upon the researcher's findings, and upon the participants' and researchers' reflexive engagement with the research process.

The research shows that the home has special significance for women as they transition away from domestic violence and plan for their future. The home becomes a physical manifestation and container for women's hopes and fears for a harmonious future that often incorporates the desire for the return to the idea of a complete family. Relationships with family, friends and services are shown to be both enablers of women's agency and resistance. Those same relationships are also shown to be capable of acting as barriers to women's positive transitional journeys. The findings show that attention needs to be placed upon the appearance of women's agency within the everyday tasks of creating and

maintaining a home and managing relationships as they move away from domestic violence. The findings also point to the need for services to work harder on empowering women, both by adequately listening to the stories told about their pasts and hopes for the future, and by helping them to achieve their plans through challenging the limitations imposed by policies and economics.

Acknowledgements

1 : Introduction

Song Lyrics - Content removed for copyright reasons

(John & Taupin, 1983)

It is only by remembering and narrating the past – telling our stories and listening to others' – that we can participate in an ongoing, active construction of a narrative of liberation, not one that confines us to a limiting past, but one that forms a background from which a freely imagined – and desired – future can emerge.

(Brison, 2002, p 99)

1.1   Bringing lives closer

In keeping with much qualitative research and writing, this thesis aims to bring the lives of others closer to the reader through the telling of stories. At the heart of the qualitative research that informs this thesis is the idea that arts-based research can, through engaging imagination in an embodied and sensuous way, contribute to the aim of increased closeness between subject and reader. In particular, that it can help to illuminate both what it means to have experienced domestic violence in the past and to imagine the future as being different. A particular concern is how an arts-based approach to the recording of expressions of lived experience and feelings has the potential to give access to multi-sensory and embodied knowledge in a way that words alone might struggle to articulate. This includes the role that imagination plays in the construction of the past, the present and the future. As will be demonstrated within the Chapter 2, domestic violence is a well-researched area of enquiry, but what this thesis uniquely aims to do is to evaluate how well an arts-based method of enquiry can complement and add to that existing body of knowledge, with a particular emphasis upon how women who have experienced domestic violence are living with those

experiences now, and the strategies they plan to employ in the future. The methodology developed to test these ideas out involved asking participants to visually and verbally represent their responses to themes related to domestic violence. The lyrics above, sung by Elton John, came to represent for one of the participants the transition from living with, to living beyond, domestic violence. As the quotation by philosopher Susan Brison (2002) hints at, through that act of sharing and being witnessed she, the participant, was able to visualise a different kind of imagined future for herself; perhaps one that may, or may not, turn out to be the one originally imagined, but one that is able to be imagined in a positive way nonetheless, and, importantly, one that has been imagined in the presence of others. In fact, this goes further in that together participants constructed a shared imagined future: one that pointed towards liberation and empowerment. This imagined future links this research and thesis to one of the ways in which emancipatory qualitative research should be judged: 'It will criticize how things are and will imagine how they could be different' (Denzin, 2000, p.262). It will be shown that for the majority of women taking part in this research their individual and collective participation did meet that aim.

1.2   Background

The origins of this thesis and the research it describes lie within my practice as an art therapist and interest in social action. After qualifying as an art therapist in 2004 I started to develop relationships with community-based organisations located within the East Midlands region of the UK, with the aim of employing art therapy within community settings. Art therapy has traditionally been allied to health-care as practised within the NHS and is strongly informed by psychodynamic theory, My own inclination has been to think about and explore ways in which art therapy can be taken out of the confines of the clinic and into places and communities that are not normally reached by counselling services, and in identifying with the argument that 'political neutrality and therapeutic passivity only serve the omnipresent forces of oppression and injustice' (Hocoy, 2007, p.32), considering how art can effect personal and collective transformations.

At that time my own reading of oppression and injustice was centred on migration and asylum, which in turn was built upon my Masters thesis that investigated the role of bilingualism and translation within art therapy (Bird, 2011). One project I became involved was the AHRC-funded *Making the Connections: Arts, Migration and Diaspora* network.

Figure 1.1: A Sense of Belonging

(Source: Jamie Bird)

This network was co-ordinated by Sociologist and Criminologist Dr Maggie O'Neill and Social Geographer Dr Phil Hubbard, and used the arts to investigate experiences of migration and settlement. This network, through the production of a public exhibition titled *A Sense of Belonging* that took place at the Bonnington Gallery Nottingham in January 2009 (figure 1.1), as well as more traditional academic texts, challenged common perceptions and stereotypes that existed within popular press and media about refugees and asylum seekers (O'Neill, 2010; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; O'Neill, 2009; Ahmed, 2009).

The methodology employed within the *Making the Connections* network was one that made use of what O'Neill refers to as ethno-mimesis. Ethno-mimesis brings together ethnography, Participatory arts and Participatory Action Research (PAR) in order to create a space in which the arts can be used by participants to represent their life worlds in a way that captures the sensuousness and emotional quality of everyday life. It is a method that is primarily relational. O'Neill states that mimesis is used in this instance 'to express not the imitative dimension of social life but rather as sensuous knowing, the playful, imaginative and performative relationship we have to each other and to cultural forms and processes – indeed, to culture' (2010, p.99). It values participants' expertise as co-creators of knowledge and aims to engage the imagination of participants, researchers and audiences in order to

illuminate injustices and make visible marginalised lives, whilst also seeking 'to envision and imagine a better future based on a dialectic of mutual recognition, care, respect for human rights, cultural citizenship and democratic processes' (2010, p.100). It is a method in which the future of participants is considered to be as worthy of investigation as their past and present; as such it is a methodology that has the potential to meet Norman Denzin's (2000) criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research set out above. It is a methodology I witnessed first-hand as having an empowering effect upon participants. It is also a powerful example of synthesising academic research with social action, or what O'Neill (2010) refers to as performative praxis.

At the same time as being involved in the *Making the Connections* network I had secured funding to provide art therapy for an organization that provided support for female survivors of domestic violence. The organization was allied to Women's Aid Federation England[1] and its locality meant that the majority of its clientele were of South Asian or African-Caribbean descent. The limits of funding meant that the intervention I was able to provide was only short-term, but through evaluation it was clear that participants made good use of art materials to explore the emotional impacts of domestic violence upon them. Whilst engaged with this work I became increasingly conscious of the cost of domestic violence upon personal well-being and social cohesion and of how hidden domestic violence remains and of how post-2008 economics was impacting upon the ability of services to provide adequate support to those who experience domestic violence. From these various strands the idea formed of making the focus of my PhD a synthesis of the methodology employed within the *Making the Connections* network, with an emphasis upon the experiences of domestic violence. In the same way that ethno-mimesis had been used within the *Making the Connections* network to address the cultural marginalisation and silencing of refugees and asylum seekers, I would be attempting to adapt the methodology so that a similar process of illumination and empowerment might be possible when working alongside women who had experienced domestic violence. An initial search of academic literature revealed that this would be a novel approach, despite some fleeting hints within literature and online resources that community arts had been used to engage audiences in addressing and thinking about domestic violence (HOPE exhibition, 2012[2]; Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2002).

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[1] I use the shortened title, Women's Aid, throughout the remainder of this thesis.
[2] http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net/?page_id=1105

1.3 Frame: what is covered and what is not

This thesis is limited to women's experience of domestic violence. This is not to deny that men can also experience domestic violence (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Straus et al, 1980), but the research that informs this thesis was conducted in partnership with organisations connected to Women's Aid and whose clientele, at the time of conducting the research, was exclusively female. My own biography, as a man who is receptive of feminist thought and action, with female friends and family who have experienced domestic violence, also added to my interest in furthering the understanding of women's experience of domestic violence. The participants in the research only reported violence that occurred within heterosexual relationships, although extended family and children contributed to that violence. Participants in the pilot study displayed a range of ethnicities, whereas the participants in the main study were white British: a reflection of the locality of the two components but also a reflection of problems of recruitment. The study was conducted within the East Midlands of the United Kingdom, with a small number of participants. A total of eight complete stories were created within the research groups that took place during the main study over a ten month period, with a smaller number of shorter stories created during the pilot phase of the research. Whilst a larger number of participants attended for varying periods of time, the decision was made for ethical reasons, and for reasons to do with internal validity, to only include in the final analysis and writing-up those images and stories produced by participants who were able to attend the majority of meetings and provide an interpretation of what they had expressed. I took it that those women who did not return were making the choice to withdraw from the study and respected that decision unquestioningly. In spite of the small number of completed stories I will show how the research findings add to existing knowledge of domestic violence in terms of providing insight into how women transition away from domestic violence.

1.4 Dilemmas

As well as issues of participation, the evaluation of the methodology is strongly informed by three inter-woven dilemmas that emerged during the conducting of the research. These are:

1. Being a man researching women's experience of domestic violence
2. Integrating the two epistemologies of arts-based knowledge and word-based knowledge

3. Research participants engaging with the process as if it were a therapeutic intervention

The first dilemma has been a consistent issue throughout the process of developing and conducting the research and has been critical to the philosophical approach adopted, as well as to the methodology developed and employed. Essentially, a feminist epistemology was chosen, but even this leaves the question of how to reconcile my own gender with the study of a subject that places associates me with patriarchal systems of power and a representative of masculine aggression. *Feminist standpoint theory* (Harding, 2004) and *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991) have helped to manage that dilemma to some extent. However, it remains a problematic issue, and one that infuses much of my engagement with the research process. Detailed discussion of how feminism and feminist standpoint theory informed the research will take place within Chapters 3 and 4. The second dilemma of integrating different types of knowledge has itself been partly resolved through adopting a feminist approach to knowledge production. It has also been aided by the substantial literature that exists around the use of non-verbal evidence within sociological and ethnographic research. In addition to the work of O'Neill, the work of Sarah Pink (2009; 2007) has significantly informed my thinking about images within research. As introduced already, whilst art therapy literature places the image centrally within its exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal psychological processes and outcomes, it has more recently started to pay attention to the production of visual images within sociological and ethnographic contexts (McNiff, 2012; Hogan 2011; Pink, Hogan & Bird, 2011; Kaplan, 2007). Chapter 3 discusses these issues in detail. The final dilemma of research participants engaging with research as if it were a therapeutic encounter emerged during the conducting of the research, and was harder to contain by reference to pre-existing literature. It is an issue that appeared frequently within my reflexive response to working with participants. Discussion of this crucial and critical issue will take place during the evaluation of the methodology within Chapter 9.

1.5   Why use the domestic violence label?

In this thesis I will be using the term domestic violence, as opposed to domestic abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV), although none of those terms are ideal. The term domestic violence has the potential of being interpreted as only to do with physical assault, whilst also suggesting that the violence exists primarily within a closed-off and private domestic space. The term domestic abuse, whilst incorporating physical assault, also incorporates other forms

of systematic control: psychological, financial, spiritual, social and so forth; but it is though still confined to the domestic space. The label IPV on the other hand, whilst not being confined to the domestic space, suggests that physical, mental or other assault only occurs between intimate partners. As a label it does not distinguish between same-sex or heterosexual couples but it is by implication limited to intimate relationships, with literature that uses that term often confining itself to the study of violence that occurs exclusively between two individuals (Barner & Carney, 2011; Hines & Douglas, 2010). A more detailed reading of literature that uses these terms reveals that they do not define the scope of their investigations so narrowly, with empirical data (ONS, 2014; Smith, 2012) showing that abuse comes in many forms, includes inter-generational and inter-family relationships, and is situated within cultural and community contexts. My own research shows that participants' experiences were not confined to intimate partners or the family home.

In spite of these critiques, those three terms are the most commonly used phrases by academics, activists, UK government agencies and organizations such as Women's Aid. Further to this, both Women's Aid and the UK Home Office explicitly use the term domestic violence, even though how they define that term incorporates the diversity outlined above. At the time of conducting the research the Home Office defined domestic violence as:

> Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.
>
> (Home Office, 2012, no page).

And for Women's Aid domestic violence was, and still is, defined as:

> [P]hysical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'. Domestic violence may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are in themselves inherently 'violent'.
>
> (Women's Aid, 2013, no page)

The key difference between these two definitions is Women's Aid's acknowledgement of the existence of systematic patterns of control and violence. Since March 2013, the Home Office has defined domestic violence in the following way:

> Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.
>
> (Home Office, 2013, no page)

This new Home Office definition lowers the age at which domestic violence is deemed significant and comes closer to Women's Aid's definition in its recognition of the controlling and coercive component of behaviour, stating that:

> Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of 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. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.
>
> (Home Office, 2013, no page)

The Home Office states that this definition includes 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage, whilst noting that domestic violence is not a legal definition, which makes the reporting of incidents of domestic violence problematic. Both Women's Aid and the Home Office incorporate violence beyond intimate partners in their definitions, which distances them from the narrower focus of IPV. Legally, within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, domestic violence is covered by the *Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004* (HMSO, 2004), the *Domestic Violence Crime and Victims (amendment) Act 2012* (HMSO, 2012a) and the *Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007* (HMSO, 2007). Together, these incorporate violence within same-sex relationships, honour-based violence and the more commonly understood forms of domestic violence.

For pragmatic reasons I have chosen to adopt the term domestic violence within the writing of this thesis because it is still the term most widely used by the general public and by key public institutions and organizations within the UK (Nicolson, 2010); therefore potential participants were most likely to be familiar with the term domestic violence.

1.6   Imagination, embodiment and story

Imagination, embodiment and story are crucial components of the methodology. In particular, phenomenology holds that imagination, and in turn the body, are of equal in value to rationalist and empirical methods of knowledge production. In this way phenomenology is a common philosophical influence upon the adopted methodological positions of PAR, ethno-mimesis and feminist standpoint theory.

Building upon phenomenology, and feeding into PAR, ethno-mimesis and feminist standpoint theory, are those modern and post-modern philosophies that make use of imagination, the body and story to understand the workings of personal and social ethics. In his analysis of the role of imagination within modern European thought Richard Kearney refers to imagination as being essential to ethics because of its '*empathic* powers of receptivity to the other' (Kearney, 1991, p.224, original emphasis). If my own research is to be deemed to be of value, particularly when considering feminist standpoint epistemology's call for starting research in the lives of women (Harding, 1990), and Denzin's statement about emancipatory qualitative research imagining different futures (Denzin, 2000), then it is important that it is able to be a communicator of the participants' thoughts and feelings in a way that encourages empathic and imaginative responses.

Denzin's statement is also helpful in considering the role of imagination and time. Accommodation of the future when thinking about responses to domestic violence is an important element here, and as well as imagination being an aid to empathic communication it is, I suggest, imagination that allows the future to be a valid focus for this research. As Kearney states, when interpreting Sartre's analysis of imagination: 'the imagined object may be a synthesis of past, present and future time' (Kearney, 1991, p.54). Paradoxically, it also appears that it is imagination, as well as memory, that gives access to past experiences; with a further twist being that the future is as much a product of memory as it is of the imagination. In this way the rather strange idea that we imagine the past and remember the future starts to take shape. This process is articulated within Susan Brison's (2002) concept of pre-memories and post-memories in relation to sexual violence. This was a subject she confronted when her training as a philosopher within the tradition of logical positivism failed to help her make sense of, and recover from, being raped and nearly murdered. In attempting to regain her identity and carry on she found herself having to turn to subjectivity, embodiment and imagination rather than logic and rationality. Brison's work is important not only in what it contributes to thinking about imagination, but also as a contributor to the construction of an

argument that encompasses the variety of stories told by participants, including the ability of imagination to manipulate the flow of narrative time.

The epistemological use of imagination, embodiment and story is considered important enough to the uniqueness of this thesis to require considerable investigation, and this takes place in Chapter 3.

1.7   Rationale for style of presentation

Whilst the presentation of this thesis follows a rather traditional structure, non-traditional forms and styles are included where they add to the value of the thesis. Throughout the life of this study I have been led by a strong ethical concern that the participants of the research should be safe, but also be seen and heard, and that the research, thesis and any subsequent dissemination should ultimately bear witness to their experiences, stories and visual productions. In order to do this I have had to find a way of accommodating the emotional power and impact not only of the spoken and written word but also of the way in which those emotions were embodied within visual images, poetry and even song lyrics. A process of translation takes place when incorporating multi-sensory expressions onto the printed page such that their immediacy and physicality is compromised. This is an inevitable process in any research that involves taking a researcher-participant encounter and transforming it into an academic text. It is though necessary to try and reclaim that immediacy, so that whilst the earlier chapters that review literature and set forth epistemological and methodological frameworks are set out in a rigorous and formal way, later chapters introduce visual images within the text, and introduce my own first-person reflexive and embodied responses to those images. Furthermore, the dilemmas encountered regarding gender and epistemologies render the use of images and reflexive responses a necessary component of this work. However, these non-traditional forms will be grounded by linking them back to literature; in this way a multi-layered presentation of evidence will produce a document that engages the stereoscopic imagination of the reader. In using the term stereoscopic imagination I refer to combining different perspectives to provide depth in the mind of the reader, and take the term from ethnographic film maker David MacDougall's exploration of visual ethnography, who writes that within stereoscopic imagination 'the viewer is physically implicated in the scene as an observer positioned spatially in relation to every other object' (2006, p.249). As well as referencing imagination, MacDougall's statement about the viewer being physically connected to what is seen also resonates with the ideas expressed so far regarding

embodiment, and with how imagination and embodiment can be employed in the service of closeness and empathy. The use of images within this work is intended therefore to help to bring the participants and reader closer together.

Feminist methodologies - particularly feminist standpoint methodologies - encourage the researcher to acknowledge and examine their own position within the research they are associated with; a process commonly referred to as reflexivity (Letherby, 2003). This has been central to the planning and conducting of my own research and I have tried to reflexively respond to the way gender has shaped my engagement with the topic of domestic violence and with the participants' stories. Because of the importance of reflexivity to the philosophical and methodological position adopted, the discussion of participants' stories includes my own reflexive responses to those stories.

1.8 Outline of chapters

Chapter 2 is devoted to a review of literature relating to how domestic violence has been conceptualised and understood over the last four decades. This is, in part, achieved by presenting a linear and historical account of how domestic violence appears within literature. However, such an approach does not fully reflect the complex and competing arguments that have shaped understandings of domestic violence within different disciplines, and so I have chosen also to consider how it reflects the concerns of varying sociological and psychological positions, as well as how it reflects the debates that have occurred within feminist thought over the same period of time. One way of framing the literature is to consider it as a set of competing stories; and whilst the vast majority of the research that I reference tell their stories through the use of statistical data, or data gathered through interview or focus groups, some research has been sourced that employs visual methods. The review of literature begun in Chapter 2 is continued into Chapter 3, where the unique role of imagination, embodiment and storytelling within the epistemology that underpins this thesis is considered in greater detail through reference to appropriate literature. Chapter 3 also provides a detailed exploration of how arts-based research can be synthesised with PAR and feminist standpoint theory. An outline of the theoretical underpinnings of the chosen method and a discussion about the two dilemmas identified earlier that are concerned with my gendered position as a male researcher and the integration of arts-based and text-based knowledge also form part of Chapter 3. Together, these different elements of Chapter 3 constitute the epistemological and methodological framework that underpins the research. In Chapter 4, how that

epistemological and methodological framework was operationalized through the research design becomes the focus. Points for discussion in Chapter 4 include the sampling and recruitment of participants, the role of the pilot study in the refinement of the ethical component of the research, and the way in which data were collected and analysed.

Chapter 5 begins the process of presenting participants' stories, clustering these stories into themes. This includes the images made by participants, extracts from notes made at the time those images were made, participants' reflections upon images at the end of their participation and my interpretation of the images. Those interpretations, as well as paying close attention to what women said about their own images, incorporate my own embodied and reflexive responses. Chapters 6 and 7 continue the presentation of stories and themes, and subsequently Chapter 8 brings together those themes, relating them back to the debates and arguments set forth within Chapter 2. Further links are made to other literature to offer original insights into how domestic violence impacts upon women and the strategies that they develop in response. The themes identified include the following key points: ownership and management of the physical environment provides women with a sense of agency and escape; there is for those women with children an overwhelming wish for a return to a state of being a complete family; relationships offer the possibility of both support and frustration whereby agencies such as Social Services are capable of supporting women but are also capable of undermining women and further damaging their confidence; and there is very often confusion about why things happened in the past along with continued doubt and anxiety about what will happen in the future. In giving structure and form to the themes identified two authors in particular are extensively referred to: these are Arthur Frank (1995) and Susan Brison (2002), who have examined the role of narrative when living with and recovering from illness, and the effect of violence upon the unmaking and remaking of self-identity respectively. I also draw upon ideas concerning embodiment and intersectionality, within which gender, as one intersecting component of identity, is not so much about being female or being male, but is instead a process of becoming. Reference is made to the idea of escape attempts as developed by sociologist Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor (1992). Those concepts of narrative, remaking, becoming and escape are used to help think about the sort of strategies and tactics that participants have used in the past and are using now to help them transition away from domestic violence. The explanation that I construct argues that past experiences of domestic violence exert a strong influence upon both women's perception of their past and present, but also upon how they imagine the future; and that the management of domestic spaces and relationships in the present allows women to regain a sense of

autonomy, agency, belonging and movement forward, and this includes allowing for the possibility of the return to previously held ideas about home and family. Taken collectively I propose that the stories be termed *transitional stories* because of the way they map out how women move away from domestic violence and towards safer and more fulfilling futures. Chapter 8 closes by making suggestions for how the findings can be used to inform practice. Attention is paid to how counselling services can employ creative means to make use of women's imagination to help them to move away from domestic violence. Attention is also given to how support services can work in more integrated and accountable ways.

Chapter 9 offers an evaluation of the methodology, implications for current practice, and suggestions for further research. The evaluation will address the third dilemma identified that is concerned with research becoming a therapy. The methodology shows that despite problems of recruitment, and the merging of research and therapy, arts-based research is of value because it allows memory and imagination to be embodied in a way that enables the past, the present and the future to be seen by others. The length of time spent constructing images also means that participants can slowly develop their thoughts and responses, whilst the images open up the possibility of dissemination beyond academic contexts. I end by suggesting that similar arts-based research be conducted with different groups of women, perhaps to reflect different ethnicities or different sexualities. Working in this way with men who have experienced domestic violence is also a real possibility. Finally, how the images made within this project form part of a dissemination strategy are outlined in the final chapter.

1.9 Summary

At the core of this thesis is a desire that the stories told will have an influence upon the way in which domestic violence is understood and responded to, particularly in terms of how women envision their future, so that whichever agencies women come into contact with might be better able to assist them in realising those futures. The arts-based methodology employed makes use of imagination because it not only aids the participants in their expression of thoughts and feelings, but also aids the reader and viewer to enter into an empathic and embodied response to those expressions. Whilst research upon domestic violence is wide ranging, and arts-based methods are widely employed, their synthesis here is original, and particularly so when attention to participants' imagined futures is made the central focus of attention. The methodology is not without its challenges, but those challenges

open up useful discussion about the nature of different types of knowledge, their relationship to gender and the nature of research participation.

In the final analysis of the methodology, and the stories that the methodology enabled, it will be shown that visual methods, imagination and attention to the future can come together to produce meaningful knowledge about how women transition and move away from domestic violence in ways that incorporate the management of material and relational aspects of being and belonging. To begin, sustained attention is given to domestic violence literature.

2 : Stories of Domestic Violence in Literature

2.1 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters which review relevant academic literature. This chapter aims to review historical and contemporary literature pertaining to domestic violence, in order to provide a context for my own research and to better clarify the particular area that is under-researched and worthy of further investigation, whilst the following chapter will review literature pertinent to the epistemological and methodological issues that arose in the design of the research.

The aim of the research employed within this thesis is not to quantify the prevalence of incidents of violence and abuse within intimate and family relationships; nor is it aiming to prove, disprove or establish the validity of the various explanations for the causes of abuse and violence. It is instead aiming to investigate how the arts can contribute to an understanding of how women who have experienced domestic violence live with that experience and create their futures. Therefore, whilst an overview of current quantitative data relating to what is known about the frequency of domestic violence and abuse within the UK now is included here, this particular aspect of the literature will not be dwelt upon in great detail. Instead, the focus is upon the ways in which literature about domestic violence constructs and tells its stories; and how it allows women to tell their own story. This is not to discount the material reality of domestic violence and abuse, but rather to acknowledge that in the context of this study, where narrative and story have such a central role, a more appropriate response to the literature is to adopt an approach that acknowledges the importance of considering the ways in which stories are constructed within literature, and how those stories permeate through to practice and everyday life. As such, whilst a purely historical and linear approach to the literature is possible, a tactic has been employed that presents themes that have generated critical discourse within the study of domestic violence over the past four decades.

An approach such as the one outlined above is not without precedence within the study of domestic violence and feminist thought. Such investigations of the use of language and story have appeared within texts by Janice Haaken (2010) and Clare Hemmings (2011; 2005); both of whom use the concept of stories and storytelling to consider the myths,

counter-myths, contradictions, and the 'narrative amenability' (Hemmings, 2005, p.7), that appear within domestic violence studies and feminist thought respectively. A similar approach has been applied to thinking about women's accounts of rape and depression (McKenzie & Lafrance, 2011), that considers how medicalized master-narratives permeate literature and personal accounts and leave little room for other narratives. Furthermore, Hemmings (2005) challenges the idea of simple linear progress and instead puts forward the idea that stories are told about an imagined feminist past.

The literature identified within this chapter reflects then the various ways in which domestic violence has been theorised, managed and represented. To begin with, two key theoretical discourses have been identified that appear to problematize the study of domestic violence; these are:

- The role that the disciplines of psychology and sociology play in understanding and responding to violence, and the uneasy relationship that exists between them
- The intersecting roles of gender, class and ethnicity within patterns of violence

Both of these will be examined in turn to establish how they emerge within, and influence, literature and research about domestic violence.

The discourses identified have an influence upon political and legal responses to domestic violence within agencies. Foremost amongst those agencies that concern themselves with domestic violence are those that have at the heart of their rationale a feminist understanding of domestic violence (Women's Aid, for example), and as such, the contributions made by feminism to the understanding of, and response to, domestic violence, appear frequently within this review of literature. One key contribution that the wider field of feminist thought has contributed to the understanding of domestic violence is the concept of intersectionality. Originally defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw when challenging the marginalisation of black women's experience of violence within mainstream feminist movements (Crenshaw, 1991), intersectionality is concerned with the way in which forces such as gender, ethnicity, faith, economics and sexuality come together to create experiences of oppression. Within the context of this research intersectionality has particular importance; not only because, as stated above, within the planning and pilot stage of the research participants came from a range of ethnicities and faiths, but also because it contributed to the methodological response to the issues of my being a male researcher working with women

who had experienced domestic violence. In considering the discourse of culture and ethnicity within the study of domestic violence, intersectionality appears as an important concept and so will be considered in that light here, whilst those chapters devoted to methodology and the discussion of participants' stories will re-introduce intersectionality within those contexts accordingly.

Another area that feminist thought has influenced is the development of qualitative methodologies within the social sciences over the past two decades – developments that have been referred to as new paradigm research (Finley, 2003; Denzin, 2000). Whilst a fuller exploration of that contribution will take place within Chapter 3, the way in which research that is guided by the feminist principles of participant empowerment and emancipation has contributed to an understanding of domestic violence will be reviewed here. What emerges within the review of feminist-based domestic violence research is the importance of finding ways in which those who have experienced domestic violence can be fully seen and heard. Listening to the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence reveals not only patterns of violence but also strategies of survival, resistance and transformation – the kind of stories which complement those told by academics and activists. An essential element that emerges is the need to give room for diverse stories that do not fit within dominant discourses; and it is here that imagination, creativity and the arts appear as ways for knowledge about experiences of domestic violence to be generated and shared, and as ways for responses to be made to domestic violence on an individual and institutional level. Literature (both orthodox and grey) that is concerned with the interface of the arts and domestic violence is limited, but in providing a comprehensive overview of what is available, issues and questions emerge that provide a link to thinking about the methodology that has been developed for this research.

The review has been limited to texts from the middle of the 1970s onwards. Domestic violence was not an unacknowledged phenomenon before that time but it marks a point in time when domestic violence became a vitally important issue within second-wave feminism, and a time when coordinated refuge services for women were first established within the UK and the USA (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). The majority of the literature reviewed in this chapter is UK-based, with literature from elsewhere being considered where it seems to be relevant to a UK context. The research was conducted within the UK and therefore it was appropriate to focus primarily upon literature that was reflective of the UK.

What will emerge from in this chapter is a clear rationale for the research carried out in this study: the need to investigate and evaluate the way in which the arts – and the

associated acts of creativity, expression and imagination – can contribute to the telling and witnessing of stories told by women about their experiences of domestic violence and their lives beyond and after those experiences. The review starts though with an overview of current quantitative data pertaining to domestic violence in the UK, in order to provide an empirical context for the exploration of literature that employs qualitative methods of enquiry.

2.2 Quantitative data

The quantitative data presented here gives an overview of key statistical figures about the prevalence and cost of domestic violence, along with its long-term effects upon women's lives. Some further consideration is given to the data about domestic violence experienced by men, violence within same-sex relationships, violence between different family members, and violence within minority ethnic communities. Each of those are extensive topics in their own right, and their consideration here is primarily to place this study into a wider context, and to demonstrate that there is a plurality to the phenomenon of domestic violence within society – with each passing decade exposing new previously hidden aspects of its existence. Statistics relating to the prevalence of domestic violence are widely employed within literature, with most quoting the data produced by the World Health Organization (2006) and by the appropriate national agencies. Thus, literature focusing upon domestic violence in England and Wales will have used the British Crime Survey data or its replacement the Crime Survey for England and Wales. At the time of writing, the most recent data about recorded offences available for England and Wales is to be found in the *Crime in England and Wales 2013* document (ONS, 2014) and associated additional bulletins (Smith *et al*, 2012)[3]. Police data on recordable offences does not record domestic violence directly because it is not a specific criminal offence, nor does it record the gender of the victim. Reported incidents however do record incidents of domestic violence and do record the gender of victims. The British Crime Survey attempts to collate incidents and offences in an attempt to present a more complete picture of crime[4]. This anomaly in the difference between recorded offences and reported incidents is perhaps one reason for the lack of complete statistical

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[3] Of note is that following a government initiated review, crime statistics for England and Wales are currently published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) rather than the Home Office, in order to achieve greater independence and transparency.

[4] The British Crime Survey bases its findings upon incidents reported by households and does not include incidents reported by residents of refuges and hostels (Walby & Allen, 2004). This omission complicates further the quantitative understanding of domestic violence.

clarity as to the true extent of experiences of domestic violence and is further compounded by the fact that only 23% of those experiencing an incident of domestic violence report this to the police, with only 5% of those who report such incidents in self-completion questionnaires doing so in face-to-face interviews (Smith *et al*, 2012). One statistic that is consistent across a number of empirical studies suggests that one in four women in the UK, over the course of their lifetime, experience some form of domestic abuse (Council of Europe, 2002 cited in Women's Aid, 2009a). Elsewhere it is estimated that 45% of women will have experienced at least one incident of domestic violence during their lifetime (Walby & Allen, 2004), and that domestic violence accounts for between 16% and one quarter of all recorded violent crime (Dodd, Nicholas, Povey & Walker, 2004; Home Office, 2004). Very recent data produced by the WHO (2013) shows that the global lifetime prevalence of physical violence and/or sexual violence experienced by women within the context of an intimate relationship was 30%. In high-income countries, including the UK, that figure is 23.2%.

When reviewing any quantitative data it is necessary to understand what the frames of reference are in terms of how domestic violence is defined. For example the WHO (2013) figures cited above related only to actual physical and sexual violence and use the label of intimate partner violence rather than the more inclusive terms of domestic violence or domestic abuse. Although that same report does acknowledge that fear, control and psychological harm are related to physical and sexual violence, its definition is narrower than that used currently by the Home Office and Women's Aid. Those definitions were outlined in the introduction and incorporate a range of coercive and controlling acts, such as control of contact with friends and access to financial resources. Most importantly, those newer definitions acknowledge that psychological violence and abuse is as prevalent, if not more so, than physical violence and abuse.

In terms of the long-term impact of domestic violence upon women's lives there are data that show the impact of domestic violence in a number of areas. For example, the data show that women who experience domestic violence are more likely to suffer from some form of mental health condition than those women who have not lived with violence (WHO, 2013; WHO 2000), with up to 60% of women using mental health service having experienced domestic violence at some point (Department of Health, 2003). Similarly long-term chronic physical health conditions are also related to experiences of domestic violence (Crisp & Stanko, 2001). Domestic violence is a contributing factor in women becoming homeless in 40% of cases dealt with by the housing charity Shelter (Cramer & Carter, 2002). A woman's ability to function and maintain employment skills is reduced by the experience

of domestic abuse (Helfrich and Rivera, 2006), and where employment is gained this is very often unstable due to the psychological impact of having lived with violence and abuse (Crowne *et al,* 2011), or the continuing influence of a violent partner upon employment prospects (Matjasko, Niolon & Valle*,* 2012). Data from the USA suggests that between 10% and 21% of employed adults experience on-going domestic violence (Swanberg, Ojha and Macke, 2012). Comparable data for the UK was not forthcoming but it can be supposed that a similar figure would be found within the UK. Quantitative data from Canada suggests that where a woman has greater education and economic status than her partner she is more likely to seek help if experiencing domestic violence (Kaukinen, Meyer & Akers, 2012). However, where there is a fear of loss of income and home this might limit where help is sought from – with state agencies being less relied upon in such circumstances. As well as having an impact upon individuals' economic well-being, domestic violence has an effect upon the macro economy. Sylvia Walby, writing in 2004 estimated that treatment of the physical effects of domestic violence accounted for 3% of NHS annual expenditure in 2001, whilst the treatment of mental health issues that result from domestic violence cost £176m (Walby, 2004). Updated figures (Walby, 2009) show that whilst the cost to the NHS had increased by 2008, the overall economic cost (which includes human and emotional costs) had fallen from £23bn to £16bn. Walby suggests that this drop in overall costs is due to a decrease in domestic violence and better responses made by public services.

Whilst this study is focused exclusively upon women's experience of domestic violence, and recruitment of research participants theoretically allowed for the inclusion of woman-to-woman violence within same-sex relationships, it is not concerned with men's experience of domestic violence, or with women's violence towards men. However, empirical data are presented at various points which suggest that women are violent within intimate relationships and to an almost equal quantity to men (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Straus *et al*, 1980). The British Crime Survey for example suggests that one in six men experience domestic violence at some time on their lives. However, the data from those different studies have been critiqued for their methodological flaws and for their conclusions; for example the lack of appreciation for the context and intention of the violence enacted (Kirkwood, 1993) and for the use of self-reporting methods of data gathering (Allen, 2012; Johnson, 2008; 2007). Johnson (2008) makes an important distinction between violence and abuse that is part of a systematic pattern of control and coercion – what he refers to as intimate terrorism - and violence that is enacted as a form of resistance, occurs within isolated situations or is part of a mutual pattern of control between partners. Domestic violence as popularly understood, and

as described by UK government agencies and by Women's Aid is, in Johnson's typology, referring to intimate terrorism and is shown to be predominantly perpetrated by men against women (85% male perpetrators versus 15% female perpetrators) (Johnson, 2008). Women's Aid itself is very keen to show that whilst men can be the victims of domestic violence they are more likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence (Women's Aid, 2009b). Similarly, data for violence within same-sex relationships is available but shown to be harder to validate due to differences in help-seeking behaviour, limited sample sizes, and lack of contextual detail within research design (McCarry, Hester and Donovan, 2008). The data that do exist suggests that violence and abuse within same-sex relationships is at least as prevalent as it is within heterosexual relationships (Donovan *et al*, 2006). Whilst it is not possible here to engage in any greater analysis of the data about violence within same-sex relationships, it is worth noting, particularly as it has some bearing upon the understanding of domestic violence as a gender symmetrical event. This is a view that will be examined further when considering the discourse of gender within domestic violence literature. Furthermore, empirical data do not exist in a political vacuum but have very real consequences in terms of the funding of services; and the data about men as victims of domestic violence perpetrated by women are contentious because of the role they play in the funding choices made by local and national government, with the closure of women-only services being of very real concern (O'Hara, 2012; Topping, 2012).

The concern identified above, to do with the closure of women-only services, is paralleled by concerns expressed about the withdrawal of funding for services that work with women from minority ethnic communities - South Asian and Caribbean communities for example - due to multi-faith agendas that instead channel money and influence towards faith-based organizations (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010). During the planning of this research it was supposed that a good percentage of the participants would be of South Asian descent[5], as well as some from other minority ethnic groups. Whilst this was the case during the pilot phase of the research, it was not the case during the main part of the research. Even so, empirical data that include reported incidence of domestic violence and abuse cross-tabulated with categories of ethnicity is worth considering. However, as Ravi Thiara and Aisha Gill (2010b) point out in their mapping of South Asian women's experience of violence, the availability of such data are limited. The research that has been conducted shows, according to Thiara and Gill, that minority ethnic women are in more danger of domestic violence, over a longer

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[5] This reflects the location of the agencies I was working alongside at the time of planning. This issue is explored in greater detail when discussing the methodology and considering the outcome of the research.

period of time, and with more severe consequences than non-minority women. Reviewing Amina Mama's research (Mama, 1989 cited in Thiara & Gill, 2010b) upon domestic violence within London's ethnic minority communities, Thiara and Gill conclude that 'it is now widely recognised that South Asian women face the same problems as white women, while they also face additional difficulties in the context of domestic violence, based on 'race'/racism, ethnicity, culture, religion, nationality, immigration statues, language, and community dynamics' (2010b, p.44).

As well as violence and abuse existing within same-sex and heterosexual intimate relationships, it also occurs between family members. Self completed questions from victims of crime – collected and analysed by the Home Office (Smith, 2012) - indicate that 10% of women will experience some form of non-sexual abuse by another family member since the age of 16, with 2.5% experiencing such abuse each year. This compares to 26.6% and 5.8% respectively for abuse perpetrated by a partner.

What is apparent when reviewing the statistical data is that the methods of recording and reporting incidents of domestic violence have become more sophisticated and more subtle over time. In England and Wales, Home Office data now takes account of the difficulty of reporting incidents of domestic violence in face-to-face interviews, and so has introduced self-completion questions within its survey of crime. It also captures data about the gender of victims, and whether the perpetrator was a partner or other family member. In this way the data gives a more nuanced and accurate reflection of the types and frequency of domestic violence within the England and Wales. There is though still a need within quantitative data, as used by the Home Office for example, to better record both the gender and ethnicity of perpetrators and victims of domestic violence.

Quantitative data plays a vital role in understanding and responding to domestic violence, and the increasingly nuanced approach to data collection both reflects and informs the way in which domestic violence has been defined and described. Not only does it help to understand the patterns and consequences of domestic violence but it also helps to shape services, and to evaluate the effectiveness and access to those services (Coy *et al,* 2011). What quantitative data about domestic violence most often lacks though is contextual detail, and insights into how domestic violence impacts individual women's daily lives, neither does it help in understanding how women might want their futures to look like after domestic violence. Quantitative data then can be considered as one way of telling the story of domestic violence, with an emphasis upon counting and categorization. But in order to better understand contexts, day-to-day experiences and future hopes, qualitative data are required.

The development in how domestic violence is understood qualitatively is now discussed in detail, beginning with a consideration of how the disciplines of psychology and sociology have informed and shaped the academic understanding of domestic violence.

2.3 Psychology and sociology: an uneasy relationship

The disciplines of psychology and sociology have both contributed much to the study of domestic violence but have had an uneasy relationship with one another, employing different theoretical frameworks and languages (Kelly, 2011). As Paula Nicolson (2010) suggests, the dialogue between the disciplines, when it comes to the issue of domestic violence, has often become acrimonious, with researchers often forced to take fixed positions, and inter-disciplinary positions hard to maintain. Not only do both disciplines influence the way in which domestic violence is studied academically, they also inform governmental and agency responses to domestic violence. They also contribute to public and every-day understandings of domestic violence, and as such will likely influence how women frame their experiences of domestic violence. Therefore a consideration of the way in which psychology and sociology frame domestic violence is important within the context of my study. Here, the psychological understanding of domestic violence is introduced first, with sociological understandings being introduced as the discussion progresses.

Psychology appears and reappears within literature pertaining to domestic violence in a number of forms. It appears first as a model for explaining how and why the behaviour of individuals leads to acts of violence. This is in turn critiqued – primarily from a feminist and sociological perspective - for pathologising women and for not taking account of the gendered component of power, control and violence. It is adapted and combined with sociological concepts so as to offer a model for thinking about how women are affected by violence and how they might transition from living with violence to living without violence (Abrahams, 2010; 2007; Nicolson, 2010). Finally it is used as a way of analysing stories told about domestic violence (Haaken, 2010). The technical intricacies of the psychological theories involved are not dwelt upon too extensively here, but instead attention is drawn to how they have contributed to domestic violence studies and interventions.

The British Psychological Society, on its public-facing webpage, defines psychology as a 'science of mind and behaviour' (BPS, 2014) and psychologists as professionals who 'attempt to understand the role of mental functions in both individuals and groups, while also exploring the physiological and neurobiological processes that underlie certain functions and

behaviours.' Whilst this is a simplified definition it illustrates that, as a body of knowledge, psychology, in its attempt to construct an understanding of human behaviour, places its emphasis upon patterns of thought and action that occur within individuals. This can take into account interactions between individuals, and within the sub-discipline of social constructionist psychology there is a concern for how identity is constructed through social discourse (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). As a body of knowledge it has contributed to the establishment of a range of associated bodies of knowledge and professions; these include psychiatry, psychotherapy and counselling, as well as most arts therapies, which are at least partly, if not entirely, grounded within the field of psychology (Hogan, 2001; Waller, 1991).

How this psychological emphasis upon individual and interpersonal behaviour manifests within conceptions of domestic violence is that the violence is framed as being a product of either partner's personality style, or as a product of the interaction of their personalities. Psychological theories that have developed ideas about the cause of domestic violence suggest that violent men are violent due to damage done to their ego in childhood, and that the women who they are violent towards are attracted to those men due to their own damaged egos (Nicolson, 2010; Gayford, 1975 cited in Kirwood, 1993). Dobash and Dobash (1992) show that where there is a locating of the causes of violence within the behaviour, and interactions, of either party this is often based upon psychoanalytic ideas about sadism, masochism and early childhood relationships and attachments, which are seen as being carried over into adulthood. Texts that include historical accounts of the understanding of domestic violence (Barner & Carney, 2011; Kirkwood, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1992) indicate that the incorporation of early attachments as an explanatory model is a later addition to the psychological literature around domestic violence. A component of this attention to attachment within psychological literature also includes the framing of domestic violence as being a consequence of, and reaction to, experiences of growing up with violence. As well as considering the causes of domestic violence, psychological theory also considers the effects of violence; and in considering the consequences rather than the cause of domestic violence, those more recent psychological models that are concerned with a woman's response to violence tend to emphasise the medical concepts of trauma and of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Barner & Carney, 2011).

Whilst earlier psychological models which focused upon the individual characteristics that led women to form relationships with violent men, and to stay with them, suggested that such women exhibited masochistic tendencies, and as such were in part to blame for their experiences of violence, later models took an approach that was less about blaming women,

and more about being sympathetic to the effects of living with violence upon women. A key proponent of psychological theories that emphasise the impact of domestic violence upon women, rather than the cause of that violence, is Lenore Walker (2000; 1979), who developed the concept of learned helplessness in the context of women experiencing domestic violence. Walker proposes that as a consequence of living within what she refers to as a 'cycle of violence', with a controlling and violent partner (Walker's original work assumes this will be a man), women develop strategies for appeasing and managing their abuser and gradually lose the ability to find ways of leaving, and that they therefore become helpless. The concept of learned helplessness contributed to the codification of battered woman syndrome from the late 1970s onwards, and whilst Walker's work occupies an ambivalent position within literature, most authors seem to agree that her work did move the psychological model of domestic violence forwards (Kirkwood, 1993), and did contribute to better legal protection of women experiencing domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). More recently Walker (2000) acknowledges the controversies surrounding her initial ideas, and believes her critics misunderstood the theory of learned helplessness - often misinterpreting it as a cause rather than an effect of living with violence.

The emphasis upon helplessness and passivity, according to critics of the theory, contributes to the image of the 'battered women' as being a victim only, and therefore overlooks their powers of resistance and survival (Abrahams, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). In addition it is suggested that just as with the earlier focus on masochism, the idea of the helpless victim places some of the blame for violence upon women and that the 'solution lay in changing the behaviour of battered women' (Kirkwood, 1993, p.10). It also appears that the image of 'the cycle of violence' is used not only to describe the way in which violence within a relationship is perpetuated, but also to refer to the transmission of violence from one generation to another (Steinmetz, 1977 in Kirkwood, 1993). In either case such an image contributes to a picture of psychological entrapment.

In response to the psychological image of masochist, victim and survivor, Kirkwood (1993) used feminist thinking about power and gender to develop instead the idea and image of the woman as actively resisting control and domination, and in particular explored the process of leaving an abusive and violent partner. *Leaving Abusive Partners* is the result of interviews conducted in the UK and the USA with 30 women who had left abusive partners. Kirkwood identified a number of social forces that enable abuse, make talking about abuse difficult and leaving abusive partners problematic. These include: patriarchal structures (marriage and family for example) that empower men but silence women; state institutions

(housing and welfare for example) that fail to acknowledge the complexity and validity of abused women's reality; solidarity within lesbian and black communities acting as a prohibition against talking about abuse within those communities. Kirkwood highlighted the description of women's strategies for leaving and surviving as well as providing insights into the physical, emotional and social impact of abuse upon women's lives. The metaphor of a web is used to represent the way in which the women were caught up in a network of forces that kept them in abusive partnerships, with it rarely being a simple decision to leave. Many women reported attempting to leave multiple times before finally doing so; or leaving and returning repeatedly before doing so permanently. What Kirkwood does is to introduce the image of women who have experienced domestic violence as being active resistors and strategists, rather than passive victims and survivors.

Furthermore, and of relevance in considering stories within domestic violence literature, is Kirkwood's identification of the effect of stories and representations of abuse within the media, including the eroticisation and sensationalism of domestic violence, and its accompanying influence upon women's expectations and experience of abuse. Such representations also shaped the way that those women who Kirkwood interviewed felt that their expressions of abuse were received by friends and family. This finding correlates with those of Schlesinger *et al* (1992), who suggest that certain depictions of violence (such as those that appear in the film *The Accused* for example) be viewed within an educational rather than an entertainment context due to the sensitive nature of the material.

A common response to the psychological explanations of domestic violence is that they too often lead to the pathologising of women, and frequently confuse the effects of violence with the causes of violence. Critiquing the categorisation of mental health symptoms, such as those that appear within the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 1994), Lynne Rosewater notes that:

> In blatant victim blaming fashion, two common errors are made: the extreme fearfulness (paranoia) and confusion created by repeatedly experiencing violence are misdiagnosed as psychiatric symptoms and/or the woman is diagnosed as having a character disorder, which is seen as a predisposition for the violence that occurs. Thus the victimized woman is viewed as either "crazy", with her tales dismissed as ravings, or as inadequate and provoking the violence in her life. Either way, she is clearly a loser in the mental health care delivery system.

(Rosewater, 1990, p.200)

Rosewater's own response to this criticism of psychological categorisation was to continue employing psychological scales, but in a way that sought to measure a correlation between experiences of domestic violence and expressions of personality traits. Rosewater suggests that her data indicate that the traits measured (anger, paranoia and fear) are products of, rather than the cause of, domestic violence. Her findings are perhaps not as conclusive as Rosewater might hope; and, as she herself acknowledges, employs a positivist methodology that many feminists would reject as inherently flawed due to its associations with patriarchal constructions of objectivity. In her conclusion though, Rosewater states that the mental health profession fails to 'understand that illness lies less in the individual than in the society' (p.214).

More recently, social psychologist Paula Nicolson (2010) has suggested that Walker's ideas can be revisited in light of empirical evidence that suggests that non-psychological interventions are not as effective as they claim to be. Her own research that draws upon attitudinal surveys, interviews with women who have experienced domestic violence, and interviews with those whose job it is to support them (Social Workers, for example), leads her to the conclusion that it is interpersonal styles, inter-generational transmission of abuse, and early attachment experiences that are the primary causes of domestic violence, and therefore it is these which need addressing. Adopting what she defines as a material-discursive-intrapsychic approach, Nicolson draws upon such ideas and authors as diverse as the psychodynamic theories of Donald Winnicott (1953; 1969 cited in Nicolson, 2010) and Melanie Klein (1959 cited in Nicolson, 2010), and the concept of gender identity as a performance proposed by Judith Butler (1988 cited in Nicolson, 2010). Using this approach to think about domestic violence leads Nicolson to suggest that there is a relationship performance, and it is this which she believes ought to be the focus of attention in addressing domestic violence. She states that '[t]he description of the woman unable to see herself as separate from her partner suggests not so much 'learned helplessness' and/or PTSD . . . but that the woman's agency shrinks into a joined sense of identity with her abuser; that implicitly some health professionals have noticed a distortion of attachment' (Nicolson, 2010, p.161). It is though not entirely clear what Nicolson is proposing as a response to this, beyond offering psychological support that contains women's anxieties and helps them to understand their own patterns of relating. She does though suggest that more needs to be done to offer support to those women who are ambivalent about leaving or do not know what to do next.

Responding to a pro-feminist understanding of domestic violence, Nicolson suggests that the interviews she conducted show that women who have experienced domestic violence tend not to frame those experiences as being products of patriarchal society and male privilege. Instead they attribute it to, amongst other things, alcohol use and perpetrators' violent childhoods. This, Nicolson proposes, limits the validity of those positions that advocate a social and political understanding of domestic violence. Nicolson is critical of those feminist positions (from within sociology *and* psychology) that she believes over-emphasise the role of gender and power within domestic violence. It could be argued that Nicolson has not considered the influence of hegemonic and patriarchal narratives upon how the women she interviewed framed their experiences – a process that has been identified in how women talk about rape and depression (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011). Despite her critique of the feminist emphasis upon gender and power, Nicolson's own work is limited in considering only male-on-female violence within intimate relationship, and therefore seems not to offer any new way of thinking about violence within same-sex relationships, or violence that is family-based. As such, more research would need to be carried out to validate her claims that domestic violence is a product of early attachment and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Overall, Nicolson's work can be viewed as coming close to the psychological models of masochism and victimhood that Kirkwood (1993) identified two decades ago, albeit with some incorporation of the theories of performance and discourse that have influenced both sociology and psychology in the intervening years. Like other psychological interpretations of domestic violence, Nicolson fails to adequately address the structural and political forces that enable and perpetuate domestic violence.

In spite of these criticisms, aspects of Nicolson's work are pertinent to the research carried out as part of this thesis. The attention to discourse, story and performance is the most immediately obvious point of similarity, with a more specific connection being where Nicolson pays attention to the way in which women, when telling stories about being survivors, talk about their past, present and future. This includes an example of one woman who 'actively 'remembers' herself as light-hearted, happy and looking to a future that matched her dreams' (Nicolson, 2010, p. 125). How an imagined 'good' future did not materialise raises questions as to how women who have experienced domestic violence might imagine their futures after leaving. Further examples appear that are used to explore how women negotiate a position that moves from victim to survivor, so that Nicolson is able to claim that a 'storied sense of self as a survivor is constructed discursively through language . . . in the context and constraints of her new way of life' (p.127). Furthermore, Nicolson sates

that '[i]f being a survivor of domestic violence and abuse does impact upon the whole of lived experience . . . then a woman's identity/selfhood interacts in some relation to this at different stages of living with and recovering from the abuse' (p.122). This concern for the way in which a future is imagined and restricted by past and present experiences, and the effects of violence upon self-identity, is noteworthy because very few other texts do this.

Attention to self-identity also appears in Liz Kelly's thinking about how the disciplines of psychology and sociology might work together. Kelly (2011), like Nicolson, draws upon the work of Judith Herman (2004; 1992) to suggest that whilst there is a change to the self following experiences of sexual or domestic violence, this self includes a social element rather than being purely a psychological construct. Kelly also refers to the concepts of spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963), and master status narratives (Frank, 1995), to critique the over-identification with personal trauma that appears within medical and psychological responses to sexual and domestic violence. The trauma narrative that appears within much psychological thinking, Kelly argues, assumes a master status that denies the role that power and domination plays within violence. Instead she focuses upon the way that the social self and identity is changed by violence and how the relational self *(*Brison, 2002) becomes disrupted, such that trust in oneself, others, and the world, is damaged. Furthermore, like Kirkwood (1993), Kelly adopts the language of sociology to suggest that acts of collective resistance and activism can counter social suffering, within which she includes sexual and domestic violence. In this way, Kelly differs significantly from Nicolson.

2.4   The synthesis of psychological and sociological discourses

Studies that attempt to synthesise sociological and psychological perspectives can also be found in the work of Hilary Abrahams (2010; 2007), who explores how best to support women who have left an abusive and violent partner. Abrahams uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (Maslow, 1987 cited in Abrahams 2007), alongside the concept of bereavement and loss, to conceptualise the way women speak about their experiences of leaving abusive partners and living in refuges. PTSD is considered Abrahams (2007) to be a useful model for assisting some women, but not for the majority; instead the social aspects of recovery are given greater value: formal and informal peer support from workers and other women for example. Therefore whilst Abrahams does draw upon psychological theory to explore processes of leaving, she also makes use of a sociological perspective. Reception, recognition and reinvestment are suggested as three conceptual stages within the process of leaving and

moving beyond abusive relationships and environments. Reception covers the stage of leaving and arrival at some place of refuge (which might include friends and family); and like Kirkwood (1993), Abrahams shows that the process of leaving is rarely a linear process. Recognition covers the acknowledgment of what has been lost and what has changed. Reinvestment is the creation of a new life and the building of strategies and skills for going forward with one's life. Abrahams summarises her findings by stating that '[w]omen who leave an abusive relationship go through a phased process of loss, transition and recovery, similar to that which follows bereavement. These phases are fluid and dynamic, not linear, and women will move forward and back between them' (2007, p.127); a process made more complex by the damage done to women's self-esteem and confidence by living with a violent partner. The research used by Abrahams, employing interviews with women using and working within shelters and outreach services, was informed by PAR and feminist research practice. Her later work in 2010 involved re-interviewing those women whose accounts appeared in her 2007 study. What the later study shows is the negative long-term effect of domestic violence upon women's self-esteem, confidence in making choices, and physical health; alongside the positive steps that women were continuing to take in creating a safe life for themselves and their families. It also shows the continued role of social support (both formal and informal) within women's continued strategies for rebuilding their lives, the value placed on creativity by women, the role of the past and the future within counselling and the continued power of notions about ideal families.

A further example of the synthesis of psychological and sociological positions is Mary Allen's work on narrative therapy. Allen (2012) outlines the way in which the philosophy that underpins narrative therapy can be applied to working with women who have experienced domestic violence. She argues that it is more politically sensitive than more structural forms of therapy, because it takes account of the political and social contexts within which women live and the way in which dominant narratives conflict with personal narratives. One key narrative strategy and theme that Allen identifies in the way women talk about their experience of domestic violence is that of resistance. Allen cites the work of Kelly (1998) and Wade (2007; 2000; 1997) to support her understanding of the term, which she sees as a way of 'moving the discourse of women's experience away from pure 'victimhood' to that of survivor' (p.63). Resistance therefore is framed here as a dynamic strategy that enables a transition between the more fixed positions of victim and survivor. It is also something that does not cease once violence is no longer experienced. This resistance is exercised by women both whilst living with violence - which fits with Kirkwood's (1993)

rejection of the notion of women only being passive victims of domestic violence – and exercised afterwards as part of the transition away from abuse. In this way Allen's mapping of women's resistance strategies fits together well with Abrahams' (2007) notion of reception, recognition and reinvestment.

Building upon narrative therapy's attention to the social component of meaning and identity, Allen (2012) suggests that attention be paid to asking who the audience and witness is of a women's resistance strategy, and points to the existence of shared resistance strategies adopted by women. For example, she talks about a 'commonality of resistance, meaning making and transition' (p.111) that emerges when collating individual women's narratives. One such shared pattern of resistance is Allen's observation that social services can often be perceived by women as acting in controlling ways, and therefore become a focus of resistance for women who are attempting to restructure their identities and lives after domestic violence.

Allen (2012) makes a point, when discussing how resistance can form an important part of a woman's self-identity, that is very pertinent to the on-going discussion about the difference between psychological and sociological understandings of domestic violence: she states that '[i]t is important to stress that this self-identity is not in any way indicative of, nor contributes to, the abusive relationship in which she finds herself. The abuse is an independent choice of behaviours by her partner, and is therefore not dependent on her identity' (p.94). This implied criticism that psychology too often over-emphasises the responsibility of the individual, or the couple, within domestic violence, can be contrasted with an emphasis upon community and state responsibility; an emphasis best demonstrated by the Duluth Model (Shepard & Pence, 1999; Pence & Paymar, 1993). The Duluth Model rejects a purely psychological understanding of domestic violence and instead places the experience of domestic violence in a social and cultural context, whereby actions stem from attitudes and beliefs which are supported by institutions (religious, legal and educational, for example). The Duluth approach to tackling domestic violence attempts to shape institutional responses, and in particular encouraging the prosecution of violent men and promoting the use of offender programs that employ a psycho-educational approach, whereby '[e]fforts are then made by group facilitators to offer learning tools to perpetrators as a means to replace existing behaviours and assuage the issues of power and control at the heart of violent actions' (Barner & Carney, 2011, p.237). The model is founded upon Paulo Freire's concept of social democracy through education (Freire, 1970). Central to the Duluth model is the idea that physical violence is but just one form of violence enacted against women, with all forms

being a consequence of the power and control that men are encouraged to exert over women within a patriarchal society. The Duluth Model has been widely disseminated through the use of the Power and Control Wheel[6]. At present, in the US at least, the Duluth model, in conjunction with cognitive-behavioural approaches, is the most common intervention mandated by courts (Barner & Carney, 2011). Within the UK the picture is less clear but, at present, perpetrator programmes are less common in the UK than they are in the US. Criticisms of the Duluth model include reference to its allegedly false claim to be therapeutic, its statistically insignificant foundations and its gender bias (Dutton & Corvo, 2007 cited in Barner & Carney, 2011).

With its emphasis upon male power, the Duluth model fits primarily within a feminist explanation of domestic violence, which Hague and Malos (2005) state is an explanation that proposes that men's power over women and families 'has been built into family life historically, through laws which assume that men have the right to authority over both women and children within families, where this does not conflict with public policy and the interests of the state' (p.60). In outlining attitudes towards domestic violence Hague and Malos set forth a range of explanations including individual pathology models and 'cycle of violence' models that have already been introduced here - with their own position being one that advocates for a feminist reading of domestic violence. The role of a feminist perspective within UK refuge services is highlighted, and in particular that of Women's Aid, which they see as the most democratic of services supporting women who have experienced domestic violence, in terms of listening to the women they seek to support. Hague and Malos do though make the point that there are variations within a feminist understanding of domestic violence, for example the role that class and race play within domestic violence. This issue will be addressed more fully when thinking about intersectionality, but for now the following quotation provides a useful general outline of the feminist approach to domestic violence:

> Despite differences, however, what unites almost all forms of feminist explanation is the belief that domestic violence arises from the power and control that men exercise over women, and from the unequal position of women in society. With differences of emphasis, most feminists argue that there is a need to develop strategies to enable women to challenge that abuse of power, and the power itself, both individually and collectively.

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[6] http://www.theduluthmodel.org/training/wheels.html (last accessed 3/6/14)

(Hague & Malos, 2005, p.61-2)

The emphasis, within this quotation, upon collective and individual strategies that challenge abuse of power, fits with the ideas of resistance identified elsewhere (Allen, 2012; Kelly 2011; 1988; Kirkwood, 1993).

2.5   Discourse as story

The final issue to be addressed, in this consideration of how the disciplines of psychology and sociology contribute to thinking about domestic violence, is to consider more explicitly the notion of storytelling. Psychologist Janice Haaken (2010) suggests that psychology might be useful in helping to think about the way in which stories are told about domestic violence, and in particular the stories told within those services that aim to support women. Adopting a feminist social action methodology, Haaken sets out to understand 'how cultural and historical contexts shape the elaboration of stories about domestic abuse' (p.10) through the interviewing of shelter workers in Europe and the US. Haaken's work draws upon social psychology, feminist-psychoanalysis, and Roland Barthes' understanding of myth (Barthes, 1972 cited in Haaken, 2010), to show how myths and counter myths operate, both within feminist responses to violence against women, and within wider cultural practices such as film and television. Use is made of the Kleinian and Freudian psychoanalytical concepts of defensive splitting and projective identification, not in order to explain why women become the subjects of violence, but rather to unravel the stories told about feminist actions that respond to violence against women. Splitting, she suggests, takes place where all psychological explanations come to be seen as bad, whereas those explanations that have a feminist or sociological foundation are associated with what is good. Such a simplistic position, Haaken suggests, leads to a defensive state of existence and to a denial of differences in women's experiences. To help illustrate this process she begins each chapter with the restating of a common myth and counter-myth about domestic violence. Two such examples are:

Myth: Domestic violence occurs primarily in poor communities.

Counter-myth: Domestic violence cuts across all race, ethnic, and social boundaries.

(Haaken, 2010, p.19)

Myth: It takes two to tango.

Counter-myth: Men initiate ninety-five percent of incidents of couple violence.

(p.46)

Those two propositions begin chapters that explore the arguments about whether domestic violence transcends social differences, and the role of psychology in understanding patterns of domestic violence, respectively. A later chapter challenges the assumption that shelters and refuges need to be hidden by suggesting that doing so reinforces the sense of domestic violence being a social taboo, and thus further hiding the reality from public knowledge – something that women in other studies (Kirkwood, 1993) report as being one of the factors that keeps them from leaving abusive partners. Haaken identifies a dominant discourse within the shelter movement that relies heavily upon a feminist understanding of patriarchal power structures. However, she argues that this exclusive emphasis upon patriarchal forms of oppression leads into the question of the right of one group to speak for other groups or to make generalized claims about domestic violence. In an analysis of how stories about domestic violence were told within the battered women's movement and later within the shelter movement she states that '[a]lthough mobilizing around a unifying story of woman battering was an advance, the search for a single voice in resisting male violence in the household also meant that some voices were inevitably shouted down' (Haaken, 2010, p.9). Haaken suggests that the voices that have been marginalised include those of women of colour, lesbians, and women in poverty, as well as those who advocate for a psychological understanding of domestic violence.

In concluding this section of the chapter it seems fair to say that a fragile division exists between the disciplines of psychology and sociology. The reading of texts would suggest that a distinction was easier to identify during the early stages of understanding and responding to domestic violence, whereas later texts appear to blur that distinction (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2010; 2007), or explicitly critique those divisions (Haaken, 2010; Nicolson, 2010). This is especially so given that both disciplines have taken a reflexive and discursive turn during their more recent history. Thus, instead of a clear distinction between psychology and sociology, there is instead an uneasy relationship that exists between the two, with

feminism forming both a bridge and a barrier between the two. However, feminism, as a single coherent body of knowledge through which to think about and address domestic violence, would also seem to be something of an illusion. Social psychology, for example, draws extensively upon feminist thought; whilst the existence of the journal *Feminism & Psychology* would certainly suggest that easy divisions are problematic. The key issues that appear to reveal any fault lines and tensions between disciplines are these: to what extent are the causes and responses to domestic violence due to individual histories and personalities; and how much are they due to the forces of power and oppression within social structures? If labelling women who have experienced domestic violence as masochists is discredited within contemporary thinking, are they similarly viewed as defective when domestic violence is framed within theories of attachment? Or should they instead be considered as victims, survivors and resistors, whose responses can be both passive and active? These questions not only inform academic study, they also inform the way women who have encountered domestic violence frame their experiences. This section has considered how explanations of domestic violence are told within an academic context. Further on I will concentrate more upon how stories of domestic violence are told by women themselves. In order to reach that discussion it is necessary to first pay attention to the appearance of intersectionality within literature.

2.6 Intersectionality

The debate about the relationship between psychology and sociology identified above parallels the way in which feminist thought and action has changed and adapted over the past forty years. In particular, as Haaken (2010) points out, how it has had to address the problem of who is speaking for whom when it is recognised that not all women occupy the same social and political spaces – where they might be separated by differences of class, ethnicity, disability or sexuality. The key theoretical response that feminism has used to understand this plurality of women's experience is that of intersectionality. As a concept, intersectionality was first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s as a response to what she saw as a flaw within the feminist identity politics of the US at that time - a politics that in its attempts to create a collective response to patriarchal patterns of violence, power and oppression against women, hid the voices and experiences of black women, whereby 'the narratives of gender are based on the experience of white, middle-class women, and the narratives of race are based on the experience of Black men' (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1298). The

key element of intersectionality is recognition that the different forces acting upon a person's lived experience and identity – gender, class and 'race'[7] for example – do not exist in isolation, but are instead in relationship with each other. Intersectionality or intersectional analysis has been interpreted and applied in different ways since Crenshaw's original use. Ravi Thiara and Aisha Gill, in the introduction to their edited text about violence against women in South Asian communities (Thiara & Gill, 2010a), set out their own interpretation of intersectionality, which they state allows an 'understanding of violence against South Asian women which recognises the ways in which their abuse is complicated by and mediated through the intersection of systems of domination based on 'race', ethnicity, class, culture and nationality' (p.18). In a later chapter they outline the principal elements of intersectionality and propose that:

> [t]he essence of intersectionality, then, is that in a society marked by multiple systems of domination (based on 'race', gender and class, among others), individuals experiences are not shaped by single identities or locations (as a woman or black person), but that the experience of each is also marked by other social divisions.

> (p.38)

In this understanding, intersectionality is not about considering elements of identity as separate competing components (an additive model of intersectionality), but rather it is about viewing those elements as being mutually constitutive of each other and therefore interdependent on one another. What intersectionality allows for is a consideration of such things as class, 'race' and gender in a way that avoids simplistic stereotyping and meta-narratives about identity. For example, it challenges the claim that South Asian women experience above average incidents of domestic violence purely because of assumed shared cultural values, and instead introduces a consideration of how structural racism and poverty contributes to conditions that enable domestic violence to continue unchallenged. Thiara and Gill (2010b) argue that a simplistic interpretation of domestic violence based on culture alone has led to the construction of an image of collective victimhood when discussing South Asian women. By considering the intersecting forces that impose themselves upon women's lives intersectionality allows women to speak out of, and beyond, imposed identities.

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[7] The use of the term 'race' has become problematic in contemporary academic literature due to the inference that there are fixed racial types and mentalities, and because of its association to the philosophies of racism and eugenics. Thus the contemporary tendency to place it within inverted commas in order to draw attention to its problematic meaning.

Intersectionality suggests that a person may have power in one context but not another and that the theorising about class, 'race' and gender always has a historical and political context. An example of this last point can be seen in the discussion around class and violence. Discussions of class have been side-lined and silenced - or reduced to discussions about behaviour and personal choice - by successive UK Conservative and New Labour governments (Jones, 2011) in a way that has reduced an appreciation of the material constraints placed upon the choices people have. The political construction of an 'underclass' and its associations with violence that Jones documents can be read as contributing to the myth of domestic violence being a more common feature of poorer communities that Haaken (2010) identifies, and contrasts with the counter-myth of domestic violence cutting across all economic groups (the potential for economic dependence upon a partner or family being a contribution to domestic violence being present within all classes). Because material poverty has been removed from discussions about class, to be replaced by the idea of individual choice, this potentially makes it difficult for women in poverty who are experiencing domestic violence to speak out and seek help; or make it hard for others to consider how material constraints and gendered roles and expectations coalesce to both enable and hide domestic violence.

The role of gender within theories of domestic violence can also be viewed through the lens of intersectional analysis. For example, Haaken (2010) suggests that because intersectionality places 'oppression and hierarchy at the center of analysis of contexts that produce violence' (p.65) the choice between polarised gendered and gender-neutral positions can be avoided. However, as already touched upon in thinking about quantitative data, any claim of a problem-free position in relation to thinking about gender and domestic violence needs to be treated with some caution, because it has the potential to mask the consequence of political policies that lead to the cutting of funding to specialist services. For example, the New Labour government's emphasis upon a faith-based approach to community cohesion had the potential to remove funding to those organisations that were viewed within that agenda as being too exclusive and divisive, because they only offered services to women from minority groups (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010; Wilson, 2010). In a similar way, specialist services that provide support to women only face economic and legal sanctions for not being inclusive of men.

In addition to making use of intersectionality to think about gender within the experience of domestic violence, it also has an important part to play in negotiating the position of the researcher in working with women who have experienced domestic violence.

So, in this case, intersectionality can contribute to thinking about the implications of my identity as a male researcher working with female participants. The implications of the difference in gender between the participants and myself will be explored more fully in the methodology chapter, but here it is worth pointing out - as Thiara and Gill (2010b) do - that due to the shifting and complex nature of differences that intersectionality implies, paying attention to my own location within difference and division (including gender, class and 'race') is a vital component of being a reflexive researcher.

Intersectionality is not just useful when considering the relationships between gender, class and ethnicity. It can be expanded further to include consideration of how other aspects of a person's identity impacts upon experiences of being empowered or disempowered - sexuality or disability, for example. Hague, Thiara and Mullender (2011) through interviews with women who have a disability and have experienced domestic violence, and surveys of disabled people's organizations, demonstrate that when a women's disability impacts upon her ability to be economically independent, or means that she is dependent upon a partner for her care needs, there is a compounded vulnerability to experiences of domestic violence. This vulnerability is further compounded where disability appears within same-sex relationships due to support services having a fixed notion of abusers being male. They also found that where a woman from a BME community is disabled, this further makes her vulnerable both to violence, and limits her ability to access appropriate support. They believe that their own findings confirm the existence of a 'double stigma' and 'compounded disadvantage' (Radford *et* al, 2006 cited in Hague, Thiara & Mullender, 2011, p.155) for women who are both disabled and part of those communities. Their research is primarily qualitative, but adds weight to the limited quantitative data identified by Thiara and Gill (2010b) which purports to show that women from minority communities are more vulnerable to domestic violence than those women who are not.

Intersectionality then, provides a way of taking into account the different forces that coalesce to either make a woman more, or less, vulnerable to experiencing domestic violence, as well as helping to consider how those forces hinder or assist access to support. Gender, 'race' and class formed the initial focus for intersectional analysis, but this is now widened to incorporate ethnicity, economic status, sexuality, education and disability (Lutz, Vivar & Supik, 2011). Intersectionality argues that there is no single fixed universal experience of those forces and that none of them exist in isolation. Intersectionality was initially an attempt to introduce into discussions about violence against women an appreciation of the difference that exist between women's experiences – an attempt to challenge feminist master narratives.

The debate about difference within feminism and the way in which that debate has been historically documented is problematic (Hemmings, 2011) and suggests that as a movement, and as an epistemology, feminism is as fractured as it is cohesive. However, as Saba Mahmood, in her study of women's role within the Egyptian Islamic Revival, states:

> Despite the many strands and differences within feminism, what accords this tradition [resistance to relations of domination] an analytical and political coherence is the premise that where society is structured to serve male interests the result will be either a neglect, or a direct suppression of, women's concerns. Feminism, therefore, offers both a *diagnosis* of women's status across cultures as well as a *prescription* for changing the situation of women who are understood to be marginal, subordinate, and oppressed.
>
> (Mahmood, 2001, p.206, original emphasis)

A key principle within that diagnosis and prescription is that the voices and stories of women are often silenced, with some silenced more than others (and intersectionality is used to think about the processes that underpin that silencing), and that the progression towards greater emancipation for a greater number of people involves bringing forth those hidden and marginalised voices and stories. It is to this element that I shall now turn in considering the ways in which the voices of women who have experienced domestic violence 'appear' within literature.

2.7 The voices of women

This section pays attention to the way in which the voices of women who have experienced domestic violence appears within literature. The appearance of those voices can be divided into three broad categories:

- Voices within texts that seek to understand the causes of domestic violence, and how women live with domestic violence and seek to move away from it. This category is related to the literature that appeared when considering the psychological and sociological responses to understanding domestic violence.

- Voices within texts that seek to improve services, such as those that are generated by government services or third-sector agencies.

- Voices as they appear within first-person accounts; autobiographies and testimonies, for example.

The literature referred to will not only include those texts that fit within orthodox academic forms of dissemination (journals, edited books, government documents), but will also include those texts whose target audience is more likely to be the 'lay person'. These include testimonies and autobiographies written by women who have experienced domestic violence. Given the emphasis upon story and narrative within the study as a whole and within this chapter, and given the equal emphasise upon creative and non-linear forms of representation, it seems essential to allow stories of domestic violence to emerge in different forms. Reference has already been made of Schlesinger *et al's* (1992) study of women's responses to viewing dramatized violence, where it is suggested that images of domestic violence need to be used within a context that explains rather than entertains in order to have worth. Those texts referred to here that are aimed more towards the lay audience would seem to fit the criterion of being explanatory rather than entertaining. Following Alan Radley's (2009) suggestion that works of art made by artists in response to illness have some form of transformative function for both artist and audience, it also seems reasonable to suggest that a similar transformative function is served by written first-person accounts of domestic violence, thus justifying their inclusion here. This study is not able to engage fully with the issue of how accounts of domestic violence and beyond are shaped by media narratives and images; as such a move would shift the study towards a cultural and media studies perspective. There is though a case for consideration of all of those forms of representation which contribute to the gestalt of how domestic violence is framed and managed by agencies and individuals. Paying attention to the form and content of autobiographical testimonies also opens the way for considering the use of the creative arts within domestic violence research. Furthermore, from a methodological perspective, attention to the range of voices of women who have experienced domestic violence aligns with the principles of a feminist standpoint methodology that my own research adopts.

The justification for the appearance of personal testimonies and accounts within research literature, and within agency responses, comes from a range of philosophical and political sources. O'Neill notes that there has been a 'turn to biographical, life history and narrative-based methods since the 1980s (2010, p.108), and that '[b]eyond the disciplinary boundaries of biographical sociology and criminology there is a growing interest in narrative theorising' (p.108). This interest in biography and narrative is in turn informed by a politics

of representation that seeks to produce knowledge that is meaningful to research participants or those who make use of agencies and services – and in particular those people who are on the margins of dominant narratives and structures of power – with the explicit aim of informing policy and changing practice for democratic purposes. Broader developments within post-war democratic processes and the philosophies of phenomenology and post-modernism further underpin this movement towards the listening to the voices and stories of individuals. Examples of this democratic and emancipatory sentiment can be found within Paulo Freire's work (1970) that advocates for an educational model that is based upon the student's lived experience, and within Fals-Borda's (1995 cited in O'Neill, 2010) development of PAR, whereby knowledge is created with participants to create narratives that allow dominant and elitist discourses to be challenged. Within feminism the sentiment is expressed through the idea of consciousness-raising and the development of feminist-standpoint theory (Harding, 2004; Letherby, 2003).

Further justification for the use of first-person narratives is given by Brison (2002) who argues for the incorporation of first-person accounts - as opposed to the impassive voice of philosophical rationality and empiricism - within the construction of philosophies about the effects of violent trauma upon self and memory. She writes that philosophers are

> trained to write in an abstract, universal voice and to shun first-person narratives as biased and inappropriate for academic discourse. Some topics, however, such as the impact of racial and sexual violence on victims, cannot be broached unless those affected by such crimes can tell of their experiences in their own words.

(Brison, 2002, p.6)

Similarly, McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) argue that the medicalization and personalisation of rape and depression leads to discourses of 'victim' and 'survivor', that focus more upon symptom relief than upon growth and empowerment, and thus limit the narratives that women who have been raped can turn to. They argue that 'while helpful in some instances, the medical narrative can, at the same time, individualize, decontextualize and depoliticize experiences' (p.50). McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance use the metaphor of a 'tightrope' to talk about the difficulty that participants of their own research had when attempting to make sense of their experiences when trying to use language that is not governed by dominant narratives that constructs women as being weak or strong, victim or

survivor. Their response is to advocate for the value of allowing women to create their own narratives and language in order to re-author their experiences, and to construct identities for themselves that are not wholly governed by those dominant narratives. They point out that their 'analysis calls attention to the importance of listening for, and lingering in, the spaces where language fails' (p.65), and suggest that women be helped to construct 'emancipatory counter-stories' (p.66).

Within medicine and medical sociology there has though been some turn towards listening to the way in which patients talk about pain and illness. This has happened in order to better understand those phenomena (Kleinmann, 1988), to pay better attention to the way in which patients tell stories about living with illness and recovery (Frank, 1995), and to explore the ways in which language, and art, are used to negotiate the difference between proscribed versions of sickness and subjective experiences of illness (Radley, 2009; 1993; Radley & Bell, 2007). This attention to biography and narrative in medical sociology is relevant here because the texts cited place personal testimonies within social contexts, and in this way reflect those texts that place an understanding of domestic violence within such a context. Frank and Radley also hypothesise that the telling of stories about illness raises social awareness about those illnesses, and likewise it can be argued that social awareness of domestic violence is enhanced by the telling of stories about domestic violence. Criticism exists that problematize and question the validity of the inclusion of autobiographical narratives within research, and these criticisms will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The use of such personal testimonies within literature that seeks to understand the causes of domestic violence and the ways in which women move beyond it, has already been touched upon when considering the relationship between psychological and sociological understandings of domestic violence. Such literature tends to be academic and peer-reviewed, making use of qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis, with interviews being the favoured model of data collection. For example, Kirkwood (1993) makes much use of personal accounts gathered from interviews to illustrate the development of her ideas about the 'web' of interconnected experiences of domestic violence and women's repeated attempts to leave violent partners. Abrahams (2010; 2007) incorporates many interview-based testimonies within her exploration of how women receive support and go on to live their lives after experiences of domestic violence. Allen (2012) bases her exploration of narrative therapy with women who have experienced domestic violence partly upon first-person testimonies, although to a lesser extent than Abrahams does. Interviews and focus groups have also been used variously to explore the role of honour (izzat) and shame (sharam) within

South Asian women's experiences of domestic violence (Gilbert *et al* 2004; Gill, 2004); to gain an understanding of the influence of media portrayal of domestic violence upon women (Schlesinger, 1992); the effects of domestic violence upon children (Mullender *et al*, 2002); and to better understand the experience of living within a shelter (Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2009). Given the influence of feminist thought and methodologies within many of those texts just cited, the inclusion of participant voices is to be expected. Personal testimony is not only evident within texts that explicitly employ feminist methods; for example, both Nicolson (2010) and Haaken (2010) make extensive use of personal testimonies to present explanations that are more sympathetic to a psychological understanding of domestic violence.

The second area identified where first-person accounts make a substantial appearance, is literature that is concerned with the evaluation and improvement of services for women experiencing, or moving away from, domestic violence. As already outlined above, the agenda of user empowerment and the idea of 'user-voice' has become a key component of UK governmental strategy, as well as academic research, over the past two decades. In terms of how state-funded support services that respond to domestic violence are shaped, a vital component has become the voice of those women who have been the subject of violence. Reflecting this agenda of service evaluation and development is the initiation at the beginning of the 2000s of two major research and development programmes focusing upon crime and violence in the UK. The first was the Home Office-funded *Crime Reduction Program*. As part of this £250 million programme, £6.3 million was given to 34 pilot projects aiming to reduce incidents of sexual assault, rape and violence (Hester and Westmarland, 2005); with 27 of those pilot projects being focused upon domestic violence. The second major initiative and source of funding was the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) *Violence Research Programme*. As part of that programme 20 projects were funded; with one being focused upon women's views of service responses to domestic violence (Hague *et al,* 2001). From these two initiatives, a wide range of local projects were established and a great deal of data generated, much of it the result of consultations with women who had experienced domestic violence and those who worked to support them. The texts cited in the paragraphs below emerge from these initiatives.

Research by Gill Hague, Audrey Mullender and Rosemary Aris (2003) focuses on accountability within services, suggesting that whilst the women who use services are often listened to, not every women is listened to, and that the decision as to when a woman is able to contribute can be arbitrary and made using assumptions about emotional robustness. A later text by Hague and Mullender (2005) also reports upon the ways in which women are

both positively included in service development, and the ways in which they are silenced or excluded. They note for example that whilst managerialism and professionalisation within services can act as barriers to inclusion, it can also be empowering for survivors who go on to become professionals within a service. Of special relevance is that within both texts cited above there is the suggestion that the arts can be useful in giving women a voice within services; although they provide no concrete leads beyond mention of a community theatre company based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne called *Them Wifies*, which it has not been possible to find any further information upon.

How much a service listens to those women it aims to support depends upon the nature of that service. Research carried out for the Home Office (Hester & Westmarland, 2005; Home Office, 2005b) suggests that whilst women's views are sought within 90% of refuges, this only occurs 40% of the time in multi-agency forums. The implication is that non-statutory agencies (Women's Aid, for example) are better at listening to the people they work with than statutory services; a point supported by women's qualitative accounts of engagement with specialist counselling services (Allen, 2012). This commitment to listening can in part be explained by looking at the history of refuge services, deriving from feminist-led grass-roots activism during the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst the above cited Home Office funded research - and later documents produced by the Home Office (2009a) - suggest that a multi-agency approach is a welcome joined-up response to domestic violence, it also suggests that this can lead to women feeling disenfranchised within the decision-making process, particularly where issues of child protection emerge. That later Home Office report (2009a) was based in part upon 24 focus groups, with over 300 participants, conducted by the Women's National Commission (WNC). The WNC was also commissioned by the Home Office in 2003 to conduct a similar consultation exercise, but that time with only 12 focus groups (WNC, 2003), which arrived at similar findings, including the need to involve women in any decision-making process, especially around the area of child contact.

What these various reports highlight is both the commitment to listen to women, but also the potential for seeing these exercises as an endlessly repeating cycle of consultation without concrete translation into action. Over the course of six years the Home Office published three reports: *Tackling Domestic Violence*: *Effective Interventions and Approaches* (Home Office 2005b), *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls: A Strategy* (Home 2009a), and *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action Plan* (2011b). However a review of the way in which statutory services respond to domestic violence reveals that there has been a concerted effort to make positive changes in light of these

consolations; for example the establishment of Specialist Domestic Violence Courts, Family Justice Centres, and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). Those initiatives have been in part a response to what consultations revealed about a lack of a consistent approach to domestic violence between services and across regions. These changes to services also reflect the way in which the definition of domestic violence has been widened over the past decade to now include same-sex relationships, domestic violence as family-wide phenomenon, forced marriage and honour-based violence, and the lowering of the age at which someone can be considered a victim of domestic violence from 18 to 16.

The final appearance of women's voices to be considered here is where they appear within autobiographies and memoirs of women who place the experience of domestic violence at the centre of their writing. These seem to be particularly prevalent; searching for such texts via online retailer Amazon returns several hundred results. Although the search is not sophisticated, and includes texts that are more in the vein of self-help manuals, it does suggest that there is a strong demand for first-person testimonies that involve women writing about domestic violence. A good deal of academic study of the autobiographic form exists, and much of it from a feminist perspective (Polkey, 1999; Swindells, 1995; Smith, 1993). Whilst there is little that deals directly with domestic violence, as it appears in autobiographical texts, there is attention to the role of trauma within autobiographic narratives (Gilmore, 2001).

One relevant text involves an examination of women's written accounts of living in the Caribbean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as slaves, servants and members of the white élite (Brereton, 1998). In her examination, that aims to 'engender history' (p.143), historian Bridget Brereton points out that 'no sharp rift existed (or exists) between women's 'public' and 'private' lives and that the 'private sphere' has been much more central to the lives of women than that of men in most human societies' (p.147), and that therefore attention to domestic and familial spheres is a legitimate endeavour for the historian. Brereton further justifies the autobiography as a valid focus of enquiry when she proposes that autobiographies, letters and diaries are documents that are 'lived examples of reality, which may or may not typify the norm, but which *bring alive* the actual people who have lived through and made this moment in history' (Mohammed, 1993 cited in Brereton, 1998, p.147, emphasis added).

An early example of an autobiography that does place domestic violence centrally is identified by Sarah Ailwood (2011). Ailwood examines the autobiography *The Story of Earnest Life: A Woman's Adventures in Australia, and in Two Voyages Around the World*

written by Christian missionary Eliza Davies in 1881 (cited in Ailwood, 2011). The aim of Ailwood's study is to trace how Davies constructs a spiritual and legal identity for herself that runs counter to, and disrupts, the dominant discourses that defined women's social status within nineteenth century Australia. Ailwood draws upon Sidonie Smith's examination of women's use of autobiography to consider how Davies makes us of biblical stories to write about life: 'as she examines her unique life and then attempts to constitute herself discursively as female subject, the autobiographer brings to the recollection of her past and to the reflection on her identity interpretative figures' (Smith, 1987 cited in Ailwood, 2011, p.435). The point that Ailwood makes about Davies' work is that it is an example of a woman writer exercising 'hermeneutic freedom' (Smith, 1987 cited in Ailwood, 2011, p,435) in order to construct a narrative that moves 'away from conventional fictions of womanhood associated with domesticity and the domestic interior in particular' (p.435). Reading Ailwood's account of Davies' autobiography suggests that it comes close to being what Frank would term a 'quest narrative' (Frank, 1995), in its presentation of a life-mission being embarked upon and achieved, in spite of, and in defiant resistance to, the barriers presented by domestic violence, and the social and legal limitations imposed upon women at that time.

A recent autobiography that places domestic violence at the centre of its narrative is *Shackles: Overcoming Domestic Abuse* written by Malaika Cohen with Carole Yeoman (2008). This autobiography starts with Cohen's birth in East Germany in 1968, describes her childhood with a violent father, her adult relationships with violent and controlling men, her experience of being a mother, and her use of counselling and the adoption of an active Christian faith to enable a move away from violent relationships and towards a better sense of self-esteem. The autobiography ends with a call for greater understanding of domestic violence in general, and the impact upon children especially; and it would seem that the purpose of the autobiography is in part to expose the wider experience of domestic violence, even though it documents just one woman's experience. In what appears to be a direct address to the reader who might be experiencing domestic violence for themselves she states that 'the crucial difference between someone who chooses to remain in any form of domestic abuse and someone who chooses to get out, no matter what effort it takes is this: if you remain, you remain a VICTIM if you leave you become a SURVIVOR' (Cohen & Yeoman, 2008, p.267, original emphasis). This statement again reflects the discussion about victim and survivor status within academic literature about domestic violence, but in itself gives no indication as to whether that victim status is considered by Cohen to be passive or active. Reading Cohen's account does though reveal that she constantly took steps to resist violence

and control, including making use of friends of religious groups for guidance and practical support. Cohen does not make use of the term resistance to describe her actions, but it is possible to see her actions as being of that kind.

The social support gained by Cohen from her friends, as well as from the Christian groups she became involved with, fits with the social support that Abrahams (2010) identifies as helping women to both move away from domestic violence, and rebuild their lives afterwards; and like Davies Cohen makes explicit reference to faith as a salvation from domestic violence, writing that 'I am thankful to God for rescuing me from the prison of abuse. I could not have survived without him. He was always there even when I thought I was alone. He gave me the strength to break free' (Cohen & Yeoman, 2008, p.272). This appearance, within Davies' and Cohen's autobiographies, of faith as a positive form of support, resistance and recovery is interesting and worthy of further consideration and investigation. It does not appear though to be a theme or subject that emerges within other, more academically minded, literature, and perhaps clashes with the more common representation of religion and faith as being, if not an active promoter of domestic violence, then at least condoning or ignoring it (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010; Thiara & Gill, 2010b).

Addressing the purpose of the act of writing her autobiography, Cohen writes that '[p]utting my inmost thoughts and memories down on paper, together with the counselling I received, helped enormously in my understanding of who I was and why I behaved the way I did' (Cohen & Yeoman, 2008, p.264). This extract is a good example of the idea, put forward by Frank (1995) and Radley (2009), of the act of constructing and telling stories being a method that helps the author to make sense of her own experience for herself, as well as being a way to inform the reader. On this point Frank writes that '[s]tories are a way of re-drawing maps and finding new destinations' (Frank, 1995, p.53). At a later point in Radley's exploration of art being made in response to illness he introduces the term 'autopathography' (Couser, 1997 cited in Radley, 2009, p.87) to describe the genre of autobiographical illness narratives, and states that '[t]he autobiographical account depends for its impact – if that is the correct word – upon the way that the author presents herself or himself as a screen through which the horrors of serious illness may be pictured' (Radley, 2009, p.87-8). In a similar way I contend that the 'horrors' of domestic violence may be 'pictured' by the reader when encountering autobiographical accounts of domestic violence, alongside those elements of resistance, freedom and salvation that often appear within them.

Having considered the use of written autobiographical accounts within literature, and turning to Radley's (2009) examination of artists working through the experience of illness

via artistic forms, leads onto the final component of this chapter. This is the presentation of examples of visual and performative art being used as a way of understanding, researching, and responding to domestic violence.

2.8 The arts and domestic violence

The use and role of the arts when thinking about domestic violence appears in the following ways: within domestic violence research literature; as part of a therapeutic intervention; as an aid to garnering women's views about services; and as a community arts response to domestic violence. In addition, art appears within theories about autobiographies and narratives that are concerned with the experience of serious illness. Similar theoretical explorations do not exist in relation to arts-based autobiographical accounts of domestic violence, although I have suggested that some of the issues and themes, that appear within the literature that is concerned with arts-based autobiographies made by artists with serious illnesses, might be transferred to thinking about domestic violence: the tension between transcendence, context and engagement; the witnessing of the horrors of domestic violence as an end in itself, and the allowance of narratives that challenge identity thinking. These same issues arise when thinking about arts-based autobiographical representations of migration and asylum experiences (O'Neill, 2010; 2008) that I outlined in the introduction. My own thesis is concerned with these same questions because they are about the validity of an arts-based method of enquiry within the study of domestic violence. However here I will pass over that discussion because it belongs to a later chapter, but instead move onto considering where art *is* used within service development, therapeutic support, academic research and activism.

The value of women's voices and their role within service development has already been outlined. Within some of those sources already referenced art appears, somewhat fleetingly, as a useful means of eliciting those voices. In Hague, Mullender and Aris' (2003; 2002) review and guide to involving women in service development, brief reference is made to the use of the arts as an aid to raising voices. They see this use of art as an alternative method of participation for women within service development, and, alongside other alternatives, as something that contributes to the rise of 'new social movements' (2003, p.13), within which those people previously marginalised are now allowed to be seen, heard, and involved in decision making processes. Disability rights and psychiatry are other examples they give, alongside domestic violence, as areas where the arts can assist this move towards participation and empowerment for those who make use of services. They claim that '[d]rama

can work particularly powerfully. For example, legislative theatre groups consist of innovative collaborations where skilled actors work with community groups to construct pieces of drama which can then be used with policy-makers' (2002, p.29). Unfortunately though, only anecdotal evidence is provided, without concrete references, for the use of the arts with domestic violence service development. A Newcastle-upon-Tyne community drama group called *Them Wifies* is mentioned for example but no further details are provided. *Them Wifies* do have an on-line presence, and there they state that 'Them Wifies enables women in the North East to lead healthier, more positive lives. We use creativity and the arts to work with people who face disadvantage and barrier and develop tailor made specialist services and resources that deliver innovative and positive experiences' (Them Wifies, 2013, no page). However there is no mention of any project that Hague, Mullender and Aris might have been referring to. It might be surmised that this is due either to the sensitive nature of the topic, that it was not sufficiently well-documented at the time, or that it took place at a time before the ubiquity of online documentation.

A slightly later text penned by Hague and Mullender (2005) suggests that '[p]olitical and feminist or community theatre, art and poetry can be an innovative source (drawing parallels, for example, with Legislative Theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed, the political theatre movement started by Augusto Boal)' (p.161); a proposition that has more weight when it is noted that Augusto Baol's model of theatre is founded upon Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's ideas about education, as identified already, underpins both the Duluth model of psycho-education, and contributes to the sentiment within modern democratic agencies and services to take account of the opinions of those they serve when making decisions. Again though there is, within Hague and Mullender's text, no concrete example or evidence provided as to how the idea of art as an aid to listening to women has been, or might be, put into practice.

This lack of documentation in the texts just cited does though contribute to the argument that a more systematic examination of art as a means to listening to women's voices (or seeing expressions and representations) needs to be developed. Better documentation exists within those texts that are concerned with arts-based approaches to therapeutic support. The value of the arts (visual art and poetry) are mentioned twice by the respondents of Abrahams' original study of women re-building their lives after domestic violence (2007), being seen as useful aids to self-expression and the sharing of thoughts and feelings with others. Supporting this, the suggestion is made by Allen (2012), following the work of Neimeyer (1995 & 2000 cited in Allen, 2012), that both dramatic role-play and the

making of drawings, within a framework of narrative therapy, can be used to help women who have experienced domestic violence to manage feelings of trauma and loss, and to make the transition away from an identity that is shaped solely by abuse. Turning to those texts written by practicing therapists, a range of interventions and art-forms are encountered. These include the use of drama therapy (Brosbe, 2008; Pierce, 2008; Pendzik, 1997;), music therapy (Curtis, 2008); dance/movement therapy (Chang & Leventhal, 2008), and art therapy (Lagario, 1989). These texts describe not only therapeutic work with survivors but also that with incarcerated women who have experienced domestic violence (Brosbe, 2008); where, it is claimed, '[t]he use of drama therapy is particularly conducive to working with domestic violence survivors because the embodied process connects directly to the embodied experience of trauma' (p.223). This is a statement that is founded upon an understanding of trauma within which traumatic memory is encoded physically rather than verbally within the mind of the person; and, like most of the therapeutic literature listed above, is founded upon a psychological understanding of domestic violence. If not the causes, then the consequences of domestic violence, are most often framed by therapeutic literature within a psychological model, with Lenore Walker's (1979) work being cited more than once.

An example of this tendency is found in one of the few art therapy texts that involve working with women who have experienced domestic violence, as opposed to the far more common appearance within art therapy literature of examples of working with children who have witnessed domestic violence (Malchiodi, 1997). Rosemary Lagario's (1989) account of art therapy with 'battered women' (the term that she employs) is dated in terms of its references to women as victims and their addiction to abusive relationships – narratives which have since been critiqued (Abraham, 2007; Kirkwood, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). The focus of Lagario's readings of the images made by women is upon the emotional and personal responses to violence, i.e. guilt, anxiety, anger, loss and fear, as well as 'reminders of a time when they heroically made the quantum leap to save themselves' (1989, p.112). Lagario's chapter therefore reflects well the tendency for art therapy to frame itself as a psychological intervention rather than a sociological intervention. It can be argued that because Lagario was writing twenty five years ago she is not reflective of art therapy as it is practised now. However, contemporary art therapy is still predominantly reliant upon a psychological and psychotherapeutic understanding of experiences of illness and suffering; a position fuelled by the need for art therapists to gain a professional identity within the NHS in the UK (Hogan, 2001; Waller, 1991), and to be sanctioned by health care insurance in the US. However, as Art Therapist Truus Wertheim-Cahen (2005) observes in her outline of

work with refugees and victims of political violence, '[a]lthough practically psychotherapy and art therapy may often seem indivisible and intertwined, the two professional fields do hold different points of departure. The stronger the identification with psychotherapy the more the aspect of the healing quality of art making itself disappears into the background' (p.215-6). The holding onto the healing quality of art is, in Wertheim-Cahen's example, crucial for those people not versed in Western ideas about individuality and mental health. It also reflects a version of art therapy that is more focused upon the intrinsic qualities of the image and image making, than it is upon a purely psychological interpretation of images (McNiff 2004; 1992).

This questioning of a purely psychological interpretation of the value of creativity and art-making appears within a description of music therapy, with women who have experienced domestic violence, presented by Music Therapist Sandra Curtis (2008). Adopting a feminist and socio-political understanding of intimate male partner violence (a label which she adopts to deliberately draw attention to its gendered component, as opposed to the de-gendered domestic violence label) Curtis states that she is guided by the principle 'that the major source of women's difficulties is identified as socio-political, not personal, resulting from women's experiences of oppression in a culture characterized by institutionalised sexism' (p.129). She further enhances this feminist understanding of domestic violence when she says that '[t]hese experiences differ as a result of other simultaneous oppressions such as racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism' (p.129). She does not explicitly use the term 'intersectionality' here, but the quotation certainly implies that she is viewing domestic violence through that lens. Curtis' account of her work is marked by the way that she is far more interested in collective empowerment, the finding of voices and ensuring 'that the client understands and is an active participant in the therapeutic process' (p.130). These aims parallel the goals that underpin much of the impetus behind that literature already identified, which examined how to engage women's voices within service development and in feminist-led social change more generally.

Within the wider field of the arts therapies there is a growing movement towards thinking about the way in which art can be therapeutic (or transformative) in a collective and socio-political sense, and not just for individuals or small groups. There have been attempts to link art therapy to post-modern ideas about discourse and truth (Byrne, 1995), to show how it can be employed as a form of social action (Huss, 2013; Kaplan, 2007), and to illustrate how it can be approached from a feminist perspective (Hogan, 2012; 2007). Within music therapy there has also been attention to the possibilities of a feminist view of therapy

(Hadley, 2006 cited in Curtis, 2008). There also appears to be some synergy between drama therapy and the political and educational movements of Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre (Mitchell & Freitag, 2011; Pendzik, 1997). A clear rationale for why the arts therapies might be valuable to social action and change is given by Art Therapist Dan Hocoy who, when thinking about the role art and art therapists can play within action research, states that the 'praxis of action research explicitly derives from a critical awareness of the personal-political dialectic and the transformation of sociocultural structures through participatory structures' (2007, p.32); stressing that there is an inseparable dialogue that exists between the intra-psychic and the inter-personal, so that even where social praxis is not an explicit aim, the fact that all parties within a therapeutic encounter are social actors means that any change within the individual will resonate outwards.

There are though criticisms that can be made about over-selling the worth and value of art therapy, within both a traditional intra-psychic or inter-personal context, and when it is synthesised with social or political action. The first is that the risks are not properly or fully considered, especially when asking people to express strong feelings in uncontrolled or uncontained ways (Springham, 2008). The second is that there is a lack of systematic high quality research that goes beyond case studies and anecdotal evidence (Gilroy, 2007); in part fuelled by an inherent mistrust of empirical methods within the art therapies. Similar criticism might be made about the community art or arts in health movements, but there is evidence of attempts to systematically quantify their usefulness (Daykin *et al*, 2010). This question of risk awareness and evaluation is an important theme, and, as will become clear when writing about my own research, is especially critical when academic research starts to merge with activism and therapy. What is important to note here is that whilst better documentation of the role of art, in relation to domestic violence, exists within art therapy literature when compared to literature about service development, it is potentially limited by its lack of generalisability. This is an issue that will re-emerge in the methodology chapter.

Moving onto academic research literature that employs arts-based methods of enquiry to investigate domestic violence, again, very few examples exist. But those that do exist offer useful examples of how arts-based methods might contribute to domestic violence research. An early example is from a social work perspective, working with elderly women in Israel (Lev-Wiesel & Kleinberg, 2002). The research adopts a formalised and analytical approach to using art within research. The ten respondents were asked to create what is called a Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD), which involved the women drawing themselves and their spouses on a blank piece of paper. The resulting images were then analysed to physically measure the

relative size and placement of the drawn figures on the paper. The authors, in discussing their findings, state that:

> Although the sample consisted of only 10 participants, several consistent findings were apparent. In the majority of the drawings, the female figure was smaller, encapsulated, and placed lower on the page than the male figure. The male figures evidenced numerous indicators of violent aggression, whereas the female figures evidence helplessness and passivity such as lacking or disconnected hands, empty or shadowed eyes, and unstable stance.
>
> (p.16)

All of the participants were carers for their spouses, and no physical violence had occurred for over a year prior to the research, which leads the researchers to believe that 'these women may ignore their own physical power and control over their spouses, and continue to dread them' (p.16). Only one illustration is provided of the images made, and no other information was collected apart from basic demographic data plus time living with partner and time living in Israel. As such the conclusions rely upon the researchers' own interpretations and they frame their conclusions by drawing upon the idea of learned helplessness and battered women's syndrome (Walker, 1984 cited in Lev-Weisel & Kleinberg, 2002), the lack of social networks as a reason for the women continuing to stay with their spouses (Gondolf & Fisher, 1998 cited in Lev-Weisel & Kleinberg, 2002), and the cultural norms of the women's countries of origin, with eight of the ten women being of Moroccan origin. The research is limited in terms of its use of art and in terms of its contribution to the understanding of domestic violence. The researchers acknowledge that further investigation would be required in order to better understand the women's emotional response to living with a violent spouse, but fail to say how their own arts-based method might contribute to such an enquiry. The use of art within this research is restricted to being illustrative and diagnostic and is not contextualised by the women's own interpretation of the images. It is though useful as an example of one way of using art within domestic violence research.

A more recent example of using art within domestic violence approaches things from a different perspective altogether. Kathleen Baird and Debra Salmon (2012) make use of Forum Theatre as developed by Augusto Boal (1985 cited in Baird & Salmon, 2012) to assist in the education of UK health and social care workers about the issues surrounding multi-agency work with pregnant women experiencing domestic violence. A theatre company developed and performed a fictional story, so that 'by employing a personal story of 'Shelly's

Journey' (a pregnant mother living with an abusive partner and her encounters with multiple welfare agencies), the creators aimed to promote empathy, self-reflection and awareness in a multi-agency context' (p.888). Ninety participants were able to have some interaction with the actors, after which they took part in a drama-based workshop where, together, they were creatively facilitated in thinking through the implications of the issues raised by multi-agency working. Observational data, post-workshop reflections and telephone interviews with participants three months after the workshop were used to gauge the impact of the event upon participants' practice. The researchers conclude that initially 'participants reported improved understanding of the experience; increased empathy and awareness and greater ability to reflect on client needs' (p.891), but later on had mixed views about the impact of the experience upon their everyday practice. The researchers suggest that this limited application may in part be due to the wide geographic location participants were drawn from.

A crucial methodological concern is addressed when the researchers say that using drama in this way, and its attendant valuing of an emotional engagement with data, rather than just the formal presentation of research data, might, 'for professionals working in disciplines that are dominated by discourses proposing the benefits of evidence based care' (p.891), be an uncomfortable experience. However, they found that participants thought that the 'interactive and dynamic nature of the delivery allowed participants to *hear* the types of practical advice, support and guidance colleagues would offer' (p.891, emphasis added). To this act of physically hearing I think it is justifiable to add that the act of seeing would also have been of value, feeding as it does into the notion of witnessing and empathy that such a methodology embraces. The point raised about the tension between dramatic methods and evidence based practice highlights a fundamental issue within arts-based methods of enquiry, that is similar to the argument about the legitimacy of autobiography within the social sciences, and is one that I will return to later. The issue is concerned with the problem of validation and legitimisation of a method and epistemology that so qualitative, subjective and emotional, when the predominant research ideology, within health and social care is one of empiricism, such that the 'evidence' within evidence-based practice becomes solely about numerical data.

Lev-Weisel & Kleinberg (2002) used drawing in an attempt to systematically and empirically quantify women's perceived relationship with violent partners; Baird & Salmon (2012) used drama to help professionals think about multi-agency responses to domestic violence. The two remaining pieces of research to be presented both adopt a Participatory Action Reserach methodology, both draw upon a feminist understanding of domestic

violence and knowledge production, and both involve the use of photography as the means through which the women participants could express their responses to experiences of domestic violence. The first to be published was that by Lisa Frohmann (2005) reporting upon *The Framing Safety Project.* This was a collaborative community action and education project, with Mexican and South Asian immigrant women in the US who had experienced domestic violence, which made use of participant-made photographs to '[e]nable women to identify, make visible, and value all the taken-for-granted work they do (i.e., their safekeeping strategies) on a daily basis to survive and to keep children and others safe' (p.1398). Frohmann writes that she was responding to her conversations with survivors and advocates, where she notes that 'safety is a fluid concept' (p.1397) that is not necessarily related to legal remedies. Participants were asked to take photographs of domestic and public places that were perceived as 'zones of safety' (p.1413), with the resultant photographs being used to elicit conversations about safety. Life history interviews were also conducted with the participants. The photographs and extracts from the interviews were used to form a public exhibition with the aim of community education, and examples are provided of how participants contributed and responded to this exhibition.

The themes that Frohmann identified, through a grounded theory approach to interpretation (Charmaz, 1983 cited in Frohmann, 2005), include examples of safety as a fluid concept where safe physical spaces are made un-safe when broken into, fractured concepts of the good family within which food and cooking play important roles, and strategies that women adopted for staying safe. Strategies included rooms in the home that would have been retreated to, keys and coats in easy reach should they have needed to flee suddenly, and the support offered by groups of other women. Where safety and positive change was indicated by women in their photographs this included images of 'educational institutions, hair salons, and the smiling faces of their children' (p.1413). Whilst Frohmann does not do so herself, it is also possible to view the exploration of physical spaces and 'zones of safety' within the research as examples of the notion of emplacement (MacDougall, 2006; Pink, 2009), in which memory, feelings and values coalesce in a given geographical location; in the same that they are thought to coalesce in and on the body in notions of embodiment. Participants' responses to the exhibition included a sense of shame, vulnerability and embarrassment at points, as well as feelings of empowerment and ownership. Frohmann suggests that the 'decision to go public on so many levels reflects changes in their perceptions of self' (p.1411), and observes that none of the participants who chose to exhibit subsequently changed their minds.

A number of methodological observations are made by Frohmann. These include the effects of bi-lingual encounters, the need to take care of participants through access to therapeutic support, and the need for the researcher to take care of their own emotional well-being. Frohmann sees the use of photo-elicitation techniques as both a way for participants to provide subjective responses to their experiences of domestic violence and to empower them through challenging the tradition of researchers setting the agenda and posing questions. She also sees the method as having a healing potential, stating that '[i]n the tradition of feminist work with survivors of male violence, the discourses of empowerment and therapeutic healing have been intertwined' (p.1401); an issue that will emerge with some force and anxiety in my own research. Criticisms of Frohmann's research are that more could be done to consider the value of sense-based experience in terms of embodied feelings of safety, and there is no consideration of the meaning and value attached to cameras and photography within Mexican and South Asian culture, given the suggestion that such differences do exist (MacDougall, 2006, 1998). Despite these caveats, Frohmann provides a good starting point for thinking about the synthesis of PAR and arts-based methods within the study of, and response to, domestic violence.

A much more recent example of this synthesis, again from the US, is that produced by Haymore *et al* (2012) in the electronic journal *Futures Without Violence*. In a small scale pilot-study lasting ten weeks and involving five women, a technique called *Photovoice* was used, within which 'participants were given the opportunity to photograph their everyday lives, create narratives about the photos, and dialogue with each other in order to make meaning of their collaborative experience' (p.2). Theoretical influences include feminist ideas about women's personal experiences being a valid source of knowledge and the link between everyday life and social structures. In reference to the author's use of critical theory, Freire's (1973 cited in Haymore, 2012) work is also referenced when it is written that the 'process requires mutual respect, trust, and cooperation between researchers and participants; the method is dialogue over a collective experience' (Haymore *et al*, 2012, p.2). Like Frohmann's research then, the process is one that draws upon notions of social support and attention to women's individual and collective voices, and therefore can be linked to the methods and findings of those pieces of research explored earlier that employed more traditional methodologies – for example Abrahams (2010, 2007), and Hague and Mullender (2005). It is also acts an example of a similar method that has been used successfully with refugees and asylum seekers (O'Neill, 2010) being applied to domestic violence.

Beneficial themes that were identified by the participants and the researchers in the project described by Haymore *et al* (2012) were: the positive value of creative expression; the helpful value of being offered a space in which to process experiences of living with violence and leaving; an opportunity to address issues of blame in the sense that women were able to realise that they were not to blame for the violence that they encountered; and the significance of social support for the participants when taking part in the research. Participants also indicated that they would want the project to be repeated and that they would want to act as facilitators in any future similar project. The limits of the research are identified by the authors as being the small sample size and the limited ability to generalise from the findings, but they end by stating that the 'program allowed the women – even though they had experienced different types of violence – to come together in a supportive, safe environment to discuss their photographs, narratives, and experiences with one another in a creative non-judgemental way' (p.10). This research then, like the *Framing Safety Project* (Frohmann, 2012), includes a strong emphasis upon participation being in some way emancipatory for the women who took part in the research. This emphasis is one that is shared with those community art projects that concern themselves with domestic violence, which will be presented next.

Formal academic documentation of community art projects that are concerned with domestic violence has been difficult to come by and therefore some reliance upon web-based resources has been necessary. One example that is presented within an academic format is that by Karen Mitchell and Jennifer Freitag (2011), published in *Violence Against Women*, and like a number of other pieces of literature presented throughout this review makes use of the writings and work of Paulo Freire (1970 cited in Mitchel & Freitag, 2011) and Augusto Boal (1998, 1995, 1985 cited in Mitchell & Freitag, 2011) in the form of Forum Theatre and audience participation. The model 'calls upon individuals of all genders to become active, responsible citizens who intervene on one another's behalf to stop violence, and who, when empowered, can enact broad social change on the culture' (p.991).The achievement of this aim is explored though drama, wherein the 'objective is for passive spectators to become active transformers of the scene' (p.993). Audiences are presented with the example of a relationship within which violence is presented as a possible outcome. The audience is then asked to intervene in the drama and to think about how they might act as active intervening bystanders in real life. The authors provide examples of the model being employed in various educational establishment in the US and Canada, and cite that the evaluation of the method shows that participants 'indicated increased reflection on how they would respond to

situations involving their safety and that of others' (Lynch & Fleming, 2005 cited in Mitchell & Freitag, 2011, p.1006); although the authors believe that more research is required to assess longer-term outcomes for audience participants. Around the issue of domestic violence Mitchell and Freitag's paper does then stand as a good, if perhaps only, example of community-arts fused with an activist agenda that has received some academic-level of evaluation.

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 2.1: We Object

(Source: http://www.slideshare.net/britsoc - accessed 17/6/13)

Examples of community art and activist agendas coming together, but not so well evaluated or documented, include the feminist-inspired *We Object* project in Liverpool, UK, where the use of the Photovoice technique, similar to that employed by Frohmann (2005), was used to document public locations that made women feel unsafe. This work was presented at a British Sociological Association conference about domestic violence and mental health (Patiniotis & White 2011) but little documentation exists apart from an on-line slide show[8] (figure 2.1). The photographs document how public spaces can be made to feel unsafe when in the vicinity of lap-dancing clubs, or when sexualised images of women appear on advertising hoardings, and so fits together well with the work presented by Frohmann (2005), but with less emphasis upon domestic spaces and more upon public spaces. Whilst not fitting precisely into the definition of community art (where non-artists contribute to the making of

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[8] http://www.slideshare.net/britsoc/the-joint-forum-womens-group-abstract-jackie-patiniotis-and-lisa-white (accessed 26/3/13)

art) photography is also used within a documentary and journalistic capacity in order to bring the experience of domestic violence to public attention. Sara Naomi Lewkowicz and Donna Ferrato are two examples of US-based photographers working in this way[9]. Their work is useful because it not only focuses upon women living with violence, but also their lives after violence, and thus does not present them as only being victims of violence.

The final example of a community art project and of voices of women made public is that which appeared in an exhibition entitled HOPE[10]. The exhibition showed video, objects and installations made by artists and residents of women's refuges in the East Midlands, UK (figure 2.2). Again no formal documentation exists of this project and the on-line evidence is minimal. My own recollection of visiting this exhibition was that it worked as a powerful embodiment of both living with violence and the process of leaving. One installation was composed of a reconstruction of a child's bedroom with packed suitcases under the bed in readiness for sudden flight. A voice-over and printed texts gave an explanation for the suitcases and so drew the viewer's attention to that which might be missed. The installation therefore worked in a multi-sensory and embodied way to explore strategies of staying safe through the re-creation of a physical domestic space. As such it acted as a very good example of the fusion of community-art, activism, and the theme of strategies of survival and resistance. Lack of documentation does though make it difficult to comment further upon its legitimacy and value in terms of usefulness to participants. In terms of content it reaffirmed and corroborated those experiences and strategies identified in the academic research. It also stands as a good example of art being used to help make women's experiences and voices visible that the reviewed policy documents and activist literature advocated for.

Art as a method of engaging women in evaluation, research and community art does exist, and as suggested elsewhere does seem to offer benefits to participants as well as contribute to knowledge of domestic violence. The extensive use of feminist and other emancipatory philosophies also ties it strongly to other more traditional methods of investigating domestic violence, and would seem to corroborate some of their findings: strategies for staying safe, the value of social support and the value of opportunities to reframe experiences of domestic violence within a social context. What it does differently is to give shape to the physicality of safety and strategies of survival and resistance, as well as actively enhancing participants' sense of being creative individuals. The problem here though

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[9] http://lightbox.time.com/2013/02/27/photographer-as-witness-a-portrait-of-domestic-violence/?iid=lb-gal-moreon#1 (accessed 28/3/13)
[10] http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net/?page_id=1105 (accessed 28/3/13)

is that the principles of research, therapy and activism start to become blurred. A problem that runs in parallel to the criticisms levelled towards autobiographical narratives of serious illness (Atkinson, 1997), and one that is essential to address in the use of those methods that fit within a new-paradigm research philosophy. The small scale nature of some of the arts-based studies would also suggest that further study is required to better evaluate the methodology, both in terms of its application but also to better think through the philosophy of participation, embodiment and witnessing as it applies to this form of research when applied to the study of domestic violence.

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 2.2: Worry doll, HOPE exhibition

(Source: http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net – accessed 17/6/13)

2.9   Summary

By drawing upon the work of Clare Hemmings (2011, 2005) and Janice Haaken (2010) this chapter's overall purpose has been to identify the ways in which literature about domestic violence constructs and tells its stories, and to consider the ways in which it allows and enables women to tell their own story. The review started by presenting contemporary quantitative data pertaining to domestic violence. Arguments about how much the data truly are representative of the various forms of domestic violence has been highlighted, suggesting that where data collection has become more nuanced this has occurred in parallel with the widening definition of domestic violence as employed by government agencies and activist organisations. The limits of quantitative data are its lack of contextual understanding of the causes and consequences of domestic violence, and its inability to consider alternative futures. To do this it became necessary to consider literature that made use of qualitative data. What is identified within such literature is that there are two major strands to the way in which domestic violence has been framed and contextualised: the psychological model that places emphasis upon individual responsibility for violent relationships and responses to those relationships, and the sociological model that emphasises the way in which violence is enabled and resisted through social structures and cultural values. Patriarchal structures of power and control emerge as strong concepts for explaining domestic violence within the sociological model, much of it informed by feminist philosophy and action. However, the distinction between psychological and sociological discourses is too simplistic, and whilst they do exist within an uneasy relationship, there have been some fruitful attempts to bring the two together (Abrahams, 2010, 2007; Allen, 2012).

A key issue identified within the dialogue that exists between psychological and sociological readings of domestic violence was the notion of women being viewed as victims, survivors and resistors, with contemporary literature moving more towards the idea of women being active resistors who employ sophisticated strategies to manage living with and leaving violent partners and families, as well as to re-think their self-identities. Where this issue appears within literature, some consideration occurs of how women think about their futures but this is limited in scope, with more attention given to the past and the present. It was also identified that there are some experiences and stories of domestic violence that are more visible than others (determined by sexuality, ethnicity, economic status and health for example); with the concept of intersectionality being put forward as a way of bringing to light both the forces that enable that silencing and the stories themselves. Intersectionality plays a

crucial role within contemporary feminism, and this includes the need for researchers to reflexively acknowledge their position within the intersecting lines of various determinants of private and political identity.

The plurality of feminism was identified in the discussion of intersectionality, with women's emancipation being a unifying theme. That emancipation is aided by the bringing to the surface of social consciousness women's individual and collective stories. The way in which the voices and stories of women who have experienced domestic violence appears within literature has been duly explored, with attention paid to the advocating of women's voices within service development and academic research, as well as their appearance in autobiographies. The justification for this turn towards listening to women's voices is framed as being part of a wider shift within politics and research towards valuing autobiographical accounts of every-day life; a shift that in turn is underpinned by a philosophical concern with the ethics of bearing witness to individuals' stories, rather than with the creation of universalising narratives. Criticisms of the autobiographical turn can be identified, and will be explored in the following chapter; here though, the examination in literature of autobiography has been conducted by the thinking through of autobiographical responses to serious illness such as that conducted by Arthur Frank (1995) and Alan Radley (2009). Those responses include the visual and performative arts, and this attention to artistic responses to serious illness allowed for a move into thinking about art within research of, and responses to, domestic violence.

Comments about the potential for art to be supportive, therapeutic and enabling for women who have experienced domestic violence, as well as contributing to service development, had already been identified both within academic research and service evaluation literature. What was lacking though were specific examples to support those comments; although there were some attempts to qualify them through statements about the value of women being able to express themselves within a supportive environment. Concrete examples have though been found within therapeutic literature, research literature and the documentation of community art projects. Whilst some of the therapeutic literature adopts a psychological tone towards thinking about domestic violence, there is more attention given to a sociological understanding, with the use of Forum Theatre appearing as one alternative approach. The participatory nature of Forum Theatre, developed by Augusto Boal, using Freire's (1970) notion of a liberatory pedagogy, also emerged as a consistent approach within research and community-arts contexts. Another common approach to using art in these contexts is the use of participant-made photographs in order to document safe and unsafe

spaces. Research conducted by Lisa Frohmann (2005) and Haymore *et al* (2012) was presented as offering productive models for thinking about arts-based research of domestic violence. One example, the HOPE exhibition, has been found and shows how physical objects and spaces can be created that attempt to engage an audience in understanding better the experience of domestic violence and the strategies used by women to keep themselves safe, but beyond that no further documented examples of a community arts response to domestic violence have come to light.

Criticisms made about the use of art in the ways described are that it often lacks attention to the potential risks of expression and exhibition, and that it is not adequately documented or evaluated. I also argue that the merging of therapy, research and activism, that seems to occur within arts-based methods, whether intentional or not, needs to be better thought through, as does the idea that art, through notions of embodiment and expression, somehow offers a different way of witnessing and engaging with issues of domestic violence. Furthermore, whilst there is some implicit attention to thinking about women's futures, when considering alternative collective responses to domestic violence, or how self-identity changes through time, there is no explicit attention to how women might think about, imagine or construct stories about their futures.

Where then does this account of types and forms of stories about domestic violence lead to? The literature reviewed in this chapter has been presented in a way that might be viewed as leading from the exterior of quantitative measurement, through successive layers, towards the interior of embodied autobiographical representations. Conversely it can be viewed as the progressive emergence of marginalised voices into academic and public spaces, along with increasing attention to the social component of domestic violence. The story is not a simple or linear one though, and a number of critical questions and issues remain that form the foundation for the remainder of this thesis. These are:

- In what ways does an arts-based methodology give access to an understanding of women's experience of, and response to, domestic violence that is qualitatively different to that which traditional text-based methods can provide? And how might it allow marginalised voices and stories to be heard and witnessed any better than other types of methodology?
- How might an arts-based methodology turn its attention towards women's futures, when it has been identified that this is an under-investigated area of thought? And how exactly might it be able to do that?

- Is the implied value of participation, embodiment, and the expression of affect justified, and philosophically sound, within that arts-based methodology when applied to domestic violence?

- What epistemological and ethical issues emerge within the merging of research, emancipatory and therapeutic principles?

This thesis demonstrates how art can be used as a way of allowing ideas about the future, as well as of the past and the present, to emerge through the use of participant-made visual art. Before presenting the methodology, it is necessary to next review the epistemological and philosophical understandings of imagination, embodiment and story that I argue are essential when employing an arts-based methodology to thinking about women's responses to domestic violence, and to consider how contemporary arts-based methodology is understood within literature.

3 : Epistemology: Imagination, Embodiment, Story and Art

3.1 Introduction

I have demonstrated in Chapter 2 that there is an acknowledgement that the arts have the potential to be useful for women in gaining both social support and visibility; with the goal of visibility being shown to be a strong guiding principle behind biographical and autobiographical approaches to investigating social life. Reviewing the literature also reveals that the future remains an under-developed area of interest within research that is concerned with women's responses to domestic violence. Chapter 2 ended by posing specific questions concerned with how an arts-based methodology might enhance an understanding of domestic violence by paying attention to women's imagined futures, as well as their past and present experiences, in order to make visible previously hidden stories. Given the uniqueness of the method within domestic violence research, critical questions have been identified that demand thinking through: issues to do with the validity of art as form of data and knowledge production, and how the merging of research, therapy and activism raises questions about methodological and ethical clarity. Whilst the issue of merging research, therapy and activism is addressed in Chapter 9, where I evaluate how the methodology was applied in practice, the beginning of this chapter is concerned with the first issue, and in particular sets out to define, through reviewing appropriate literature, how imagination, embodiment and story form a legitimate philosophical and epistemological foundation upon which an arts-based method of inquiry into domestic violence can be constructed. That construction is aided by the later part of this chapter in which literature pertaining to arts-based methods is reviewed in detail. That review incorporates a brief history of arts-based methods, an outline of types of arts-based research, a discussion about ethical and evaluation issues within arts-based research and, of particular importance to this study and my role as a male researcher, how gender plays a role within research. Chapter 4 articulates in detail how the epistemological and methodological matters explored in this chapter were operationalized within the study.

During Chapter 2, in service of the construction of a coherent theme, the notion of story was drawn upon to show how domestic violence is represented in literature; representations that incorporate written autobiographical accounts and arts-based representations. Movements within contemporary politics and research methodologies have

been described that advocate for the incorporation of first-person testimonies, narratives and stories (O'Neill, 2010; Radley, 2009). Imagination has appeared where it is suggested that a valid aim for research might be the emancipation of audiences and participants, and that this can be enacted through acts of imagination (Denzin, 2000). Embodiment emerges where artworks are said to embody some physical or affective response to notions of safety or escape (Patiniotis & White 2011; Frohmann, 2005). The three elements of imagination, embodiment and story have therefore been shown to be ways in which experiences of, and responses to, domestic violence might be seen and heard. My purpose here is to go much further in thinking about imagination, embodiment and story, and to say more about how they are perceived and related to one another within philosophy. I will also show how they might then form a coherent epistemological foundation, upon which an arts-based methodology can be built that is useful for thinking about domestic violence. Whilst imagination, embodiment and story are presented as offering potentially legitimate forms of knowledge it will also become apparent that they, like other forms of knowledge, are limited and ambiguous. For example, Moira Gatens and Genevive Lloyd point out how philosophical theories of imagination are 'especially elusive' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.11), with contemporary theories being described as contradictory, though reflective of the inherent complexity that imagination contains. It is not possible here to cover every aspect of imagination, embodiment or story as they appear within philosophical enquiry, and so I have limited myself to considering those points that are most pertinent to the development of an arts-based methodology that is concerned with domestic violence. What emerges is that feminist philosophy – including a strong emphasis upon a feminist reading of Baruch Spinoza's writing on imagination (Spinoza, 1996) - offers a way of constructing a coherent epistemology, synthesising elements of imagination, story and embodiment, as well as providing a way of critiquing that epistemology.

3.2   Situated and embodied imagination

The starting point for this critical investigation of imagination, embodiment and story is to take quotations from two authors that I have called upon already, and to think through the implications of their claims upon domestic violence research. The first quotation is taken from Norman Denzin, who, when writing about the potential of new paradigm qualitative research texts, states that '[t]he moral text is utopian. It imagines how the world could be different' (2000, p.261). Denzin repeats this assertion where he claims that the value of any

piece of new paradigm research can be judged to be worthy of the title when it can be shown that '[i]t will criticize how things are and will imagine how they could be different' (2000, p.262). The second set of quotations comes from the writing of Sandra Harding. Writing about feminist standpoint theory Harding provides a critique of a number of feminist epistemologies, suggesting that 'different epistemologies offer possibilities for different distributions of political power' (1998, p.175) in terms of how they legitimize different kinds of knowledge. For example, when considering the limits of empiricism, Harding claims that it overvalues objective reason whilst undervaluing subjective, emotional and embodied knowledge. In contrast, a feminist standpoint epistemology, she claims, is one that positions women's lived experience at the centre of the generation of knowledge and action. It is because of this centring of lived experience that feminist standpoint theory argues for starting off thought from the lives of others. According to Harding '[s]tarting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order' (2004, p.128). The inclusion of men's lives in this understanding acknowledges the distinction between female and feminist standpoint, with the latter being less essentialist than the first and recognising the social construction of gendered experience for both women and men. A number of criticisms have been identified that do accuse feminist standpoint theory of being universalist and essentialist in its claim to represent a common female position (Hirschmann, 2004). However, these criticisms have been addressed partly though the development of an advanced version of intersectionality, and by the call to make transparent, through reflexivity, the subjective and situated position of any standpoint in order to achieve a stronger sense of objectivity (Harding, 2004). Here though what I want to propose is that if feminist standpoint theory and epistemology is interested in generating knowledge that emerges from more than one position, then it must also value different forms and expression of knowledge, including autobiographical stories, embodied experiences, and imagination. The incorporation of a feminist position, as identified in Chapter 2, is crucial within the study of women's experience of domestic violence. Furthermore, I suggest that it is this potential for the valuing of different forms of knowledge within feminist standpoint theory, including imagination and embodied knowing, which provides a link between it and an arts-based methodology.

These claims about the potential of such a synthesis have similarly been made by arts-based researcher Patricia Leavy (2007), who suggests that the use of the arts within research can serve the aims of feminism in general through making visible subjugated voices, the promotion of affect as valid form of knowledge, and engaging with women's imagination.

Leavy points out that many feminist researchers reject a positivist version of 'truth' about social life arguing that:

> This kind of research is based on several dichotomies including: objective-subjective, rational-emotional, researcher-researched, mind-body, and fact-fiction. Many feminists have theorized that this perspective on the research process contributes to the kind of scientific practices that have oppressed women and other minorities. In contrast, many feminists show an affinity for qualitative approaches that challenge positivist views on the social world and break down the dichotomies that produce knowledge that has historically contributed to women's oppression.
>
> (Leavy, 2007, p.2)

Leavy suggests that in response to the criticisms made about the dichotomies imposed by a positivist epistemology, feminists have developed methodologies that focus upon collaboration, reflexivity and attention to subjugated knowledge and voices. Fiction, narrative and autobiography are suggested as a means of providing alternative interpretations and representations of social life, whilst embodiment is presented as a way of addressing the mind-body dichotomy that is evident within positivist thinking. Explicit reference to the use of imagination is not made by Leavy, but her notion of fiction, through the use of poetry, short stories and music, comes close to the advocating for its consideration. Where Leavy writes that 'these [fictional] approaches produce partial and situated truths' (p.3) this replicates the thought that any claim to truth, as understood by feminist standpoint theory, is predicated upon the social position of the pronouncer of that claim.

Whilst not considering an arts-based construction of knowledge, a fuller examination of the place of imagination within feminist standpoint theory emerges in the writing of Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis (2002). They draw upon 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza's challenge to mind/body dualism who 'conceives of the mind not as an entity distinct from and opposed to the body, but as *the body's self-awareness*' (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.323, original emphasis). Within Spinoza's philosophy imagination plays an important role in the mediation of senses to that self-awareness, and also acts as the link between the corporeal awareness of the individual and the awareness of other beings, whom together share the material space that forms his concept of community and political society. This attention to the notion of the relationship between body and mind confirms

Leavy's (2007) suggestion concerning the challenge made by feminist thought upon mind/body dualism, and helps to consider how imagination and the body are related. The situated nature of Spinoza's understanding of imagination, in part because it is predicated upon corporeal bodies and personal habits, is highlighted by Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002); and in thinking about the implications of this upon feminist standpoint theory they state that 'the transformation of situated experience to situated knowledge, in particular, are impossible to understand without incorporating a notion of the *situated imagination*' (p.325, original emphasis). A consideration of the situated nature of imagination is key to Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis' understanding of imagination within feminist standpoint theory, and aligns with those comments cited above concerning situated and partial truths within fiction (Leavy, 2007).

The consideration of imagination being related to, and situated upon, the material and corporeal quality of the body brings to mind Genevive Lloyd's exposé, in *The Man of Reason* (1993)*,* of the tradition of gender bias that appears within conceptions of reason and rationality, developed within Western philosophy that runs from Plato through to Sartre and de Beauvoir. Reason, within that tradition, is shown by Lloyd to be variously related to concepts of nature: in opposition to it, complementing it, transcending it, emerging from it, and as observing and reflecting upon it. Lloyd argues that in these various understandings nature is associated with the corporeal body, and by turns with the feminine, both as a metaphor, and as way of contrasting the public and transcendent qualities of reason with the private and personal qualities of the passions and feelings. In this way the feminine becomes related to the passions, the emotions and the corporeal; each of which is considered the enemy of reason. Nature, Lloyd argues, is represented as uncontrolled and wild, though tameable and knowable, and by conjoining the feminine with the natural and the corporeal, whether through metaphor or through direct comparison, both nature and the feminine are equated with the non-rational and as the object of reason rather than its subject. In the hierarchy of epistemologies, reason, associated as it is with the masculine, comes to be seen as occupying a more privileged position than the passions or feelings that are equated with ideas of the feminine. This gendering of reason, despite the ideal of a transcendent neutrality claimed for reason, has, Lloyd argues, led to a position whereby reason is valued above all other forms of knowledge and leads to both women and men defining themselves and their experiences in a limited way 'to the disadvantage of women and men alike' (p.108), with a truly gender-neutral conception of reason being a vision for the future rather than a present possibility. What a gender-neutral conception of reason might be like is not set out by Lloyd;

although in the preface to the second edition of *The Man of Reason* she does, like Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002), turn to Spinoza and his grounding of thought within the body, to think through an alternative to bodiless reason, stating that 'Spinoza opens up the possibility of taking seriously differences – grounded in body – in the context, style, motivation or interest of reasoning, without denying the commonalities that arise from the shared humanity of our differently sexed bodies' (Lloyd, 1993, p.xv). Here the situated and corporeal nature of mental awareness, which includes reason, as conceived of by Spinoza, is presented as a quality that is philosophically legitimate rather than one to be transcended.

Of particular relevance to the discussion about imagination is the observation made by Lloyd about René Descartes' separation of the body and the mind; she writes that '[h]e saw the encroachments of non-intellectual passion, sense or imagination as coming not from lower parts or aspects of the soul, but from altogether outside the soul – *as intrusions from the body*' (Lloyd, 1993, p.46, emphasis added). Following Lloyd's argument about gender and reason it would seem then that if imagination is placed within the tradition of Western philosophy as being counter to, and separate from reason, in the same way as the passions and the senses, because of its relation to the body, then by implication philosophical conceptions of imagination are gendered in the same way as reason. The separation of reason from imagination along the line of the body can be contrasted with Spinoza's concept of imagination that is explored later by Lloyd when writing with Moira Gatens (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999), and later still by Gatens alone who approaches Spinoza from a feminist perspective (Gaten, 2009). In those readings of Spinoza it is argued that the corporeal quality of imagination is understood by Spinoza to be its defining feature, and that 'imagination involves awareness of other bodies at the same time as our own. Our bodies retain traces of the changes brought about in them by the impinging of other bodies' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.23). The relationship between reason and imagination takes on a different tone from this perspective:

> The order of imagination is not the order of reason. But reason can come to an understanding of the associations which operate between images, of the ways in which they are affected by emotion, and of the ways in which those interactions of imagination and emotion are themselves affected by the collectivities into which human beings are drawn through interaction with bodies similar to their own.
>
> (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999 p.24)

Imagination then, within a Spinozian philosophy, becomes both a legitimate focus of rational inquiry as well as a method of inquiry, rather than a phenomenon to be transcended, particularly where social and political relations between people are the area of concern. Reason and imagination become related through their shared attachment to the corporeal, with each being embedded within the inter-subjectivity of social relations. In considering the place of reason and imagination within collective thought Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis call attention to Cornelius Castoriadis' (1994, 1987 cited in Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002) concept of a 'socially constitutive imaginary' (p.326), where it is proposed that societies are dictated less by rationality and reason, and more by imaginary concepts of themselves, whilst Gatens and Lloyd argue that in Spinoza's understanding, imagination 'becomes lodged in social practices and institutional structures in ways which make it an anonymous feature of collective mental life' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.39). Thus, the relationship between imagination and reason becomes one of co-existence rather than one of intrusion, albeit one that is below the surface of social consciousness. It is this understanding of the corporeal and social components of imagination that appeals to feminist theory (Gatens, 2009).

If reason and imagination are located within the situated and corporeal nature of human thought, it might be argued that a more radical version of the relationship between reason and imagination would be to say that they are of one and the same kind: that reason is simply the refinement of imagination; a refinement that is achieved through whatever methods of analysis and scrutiny are most appropriate to the focus of attention. When it is taken that reason is related to the body it is not possible to appeal to some pre-existing transcendent and universal space where thought can access truth; it is instead an embodied process that uses imagination to lead thought out of the immediate and the personal, into the shared and social space of other imagining and reasoning bodies. Imagination where it is related to, and emerges from the body, leads not only to the notion of situated imagination, as set forth by Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002), but also, I suggest, to the idea of *embodied imagination.* In this understanding embodiment and imagination thus become intimately related. Imagination is presented as a legitimate form of understanding that is not separate from reason; rather they together constitute human thought that is embodied, situated and interdependent upon other thinking bodies. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) write, when revisiting their understanding of philosophy in light of contemporary neurology, 'truth is mediated by embodied understanding and imagination. That does not mean that truth is purely subjective or that there is no stable truth. Rather, our common embodiment allows

for common, stable truths' (p.6). They have little to say with regards to the influence of gender or other social forces upon 'common embodiment' but their ideas add further weight to the use of embodiment and imagination as legitimate epistemologies.

The notion of the interdependent and inter-subjective quality of both reason and imagination fits with an understanding of feminist standpoint theory that appeals to researchers to acknowledge the inter-subjective and situated nature of their own thoughts, whilst 'starting thought from women's lives' (Harding, 1990, p.140). Imagination is considered by Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002) as important to this thinking about what is not-self, suggesting that critical thinkers can 'start not from their own lives, but from the most marginal lives they can think of – or, rather, *imagine*' (p.328, original emphasis). Such a view of imagination, within philosophy, starts to inform an understanding of empathy, and thus to become 'indispensible to ethics' (Kearney, 1991, p.224), where it is argued that 'the receptive power of imagination lies at the very root of our moral capacity to respect the otherness of the other person, to treat the other as an end rather than a means, to *empathize*' (p.224, original emphasis). Within a feminist standpoint reading of the link between imagination and empathy, that 'otherness' would be considered not just as being that which is essentially different – what is termed alterity by Emanual Levinas (1999) – but also that which becomes similar through the shared materiality of both the body and everyday social life; a reading of difference and similarity that is problematized through the introduction of an intersectional analysis of assumptions about shared materiality, whilst being aided through the use of a reflexive attitude towards situated knowledge. The link that can be made between embodied imagination and empathy parallels the discussion that emerged within the Chapter 2 to do with the place of an ethics of witnessing within therapeutic practice (Leahmonth, 1994) and auto-biography (Radley, 2009). Furthermore, where autobiography pays attention to the situated and the embodied quality of experience, it is suggested that this provides a way for the author to challenge the 'bland neutrality of a universal selfhood' (Smith, 1993, p.19) and to instead present themselves in a subversive and emancipatory way.

The relevance to domestic violence of the foregoing philosophical discussion about the embodied and situated nature of imagination, and its equal value to reason, is twofold. Firstly, imagination makes visible different ways of exploring and representing women's everyday responses to domestic violence and gives access to their thoughts and plans for the future. Secondly, by stating that imagination is embodied and situated it grounds those representations within relational and structural ways of thinking about domestic violence. As Chapter 2 showed, there is a need to continually find new ways of bringing the voices and

stories of women to light and, following a sociological understanding of domestic violence, to consider how those stories are reflective of wider discourses.

3.3   Imagination and time

Given the identified need to consider women's futures after experiences of domestic violence, it is necessary to consider imagination's relationship to perceptions of time. Kearney's statement that the 'imagined object may be a synthesis of past, present and future time' (1991, p.54) has already been presented within the introductory chapter, and relates to Sartre's (2012) examination of the problems and qualities of imagination within the phenomenological tradition. It has also already been proposed that imagination and reason are related through their inter-subjective and embodied qualities. In this understanding, acts of imagination, when combined with rational analysis and projected forwards in time in the form of 'fantastic imaginings that change history' (Haraway, 1993, cited in Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.326), become a way for both considering and shaping the future. Such a claim for imagination fits with the aim of political change and emancipation that feminism strives for, as well as fitting with the principles that underpin the PAR method. It is here, when thinking about methodologies, that Denzin's comments about new-paradigm ethnography critiquing the political and social status quo and imagining different futures, can be recalled and related to feminist standpoint theory: '[t]he moral text is utopian. It imagines how the world could be different' (2000, p.261). This idea of imagining different futures expressed by Haraway and by Denzin is of relevance here when it is considered that feminism, despite its many formulations, is at its core a 'mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women' (Harstock, 1981 cited in Hirschmann, 2004, p.319). The suggestion here is that the common element within different feminisms is that it is a dynamic analytical process, open to adaptation, rather than a fixed and unyielding position and set of solutions; and that like much feminist thought, feminist standpoint theory is concerned not only with an analysis of social inequality and injustice, but also with how that inequality and injustice might be addressed in the future (Mahmood, 2001). This imagining of more equal and just futures is, I argue, a key aim of domestic violence research that is informed by feminism.

Linking imagination with thoughts of the future emerges within Brison's account of how she used her own subjectivity to make sense of her traumatic experience of rape and attempted murder (2002). Brison discovered that her training within the Anglo-American

tradition of philosophy, with its focus upon positivism and rational analysis, did not assist her in the process of 'remaking of the self after trauma' (p.68). It was only when she turned to the consideration of personal narratives and autobiographical stories that she was able to make some sense of her trauma and to start to construct for her-self a different future. At one point in her account she uses the idea of postmemories and prememories of rape to suggest that the socialization of young girls is haunted by stories and images of rape, which in turn shapes feelings of fear, and frames any such future experiences. This is an idea that she acknowledges as being controversial, but is one that she believes leads to a paradoxical situation in which causality becomes reversed. In a passage that is worth quoting in full Brison attempts to explain this position:

> Memory follows time's arrow into the past, whereas anticipation, in the form of fear or desire, points to the future. So how could one possibly remember the future? One way of trying to make sense of this paradox is to note that fear is a future-directed state and that it is primarily fear that is instilled by postmemory of rape. The backward-looking postmemory of rape thus, at every moment, turns into the forward-looking prememory of a feared future that someday *will have been* – a temporal correlate to the spatial paradox of the Mobius strip, in which what are apparently two surfaces fuse, at every point, into one.
>
> (Brison, 2002, p.88, original emphasis)

The situation then, as Brison presents it, is one in which expectations of the future, informed as they are by the collective or personal recollections of past events, become fused together. The suggestion would be that traumatic experiences, both remembered and imagined, would in some way exaggerate this fusion, and when memory is considered as being prone to distortion, error and inaccessibility – potentially more so through the effects of its embodied quality or of the violence inflected upon the body – then it is possible to place the process of memory in the same light as imagination. Brison is writing specifically about her experience of rape, but widens her argument to talk of trauma generally, and so it is therefore legitimate to consider that a similar process forms part of the experience of domestic violence.

Brison's response to her own sense of a damaged self is to make use of the telling of, and listening to, stories of trauma. She accepts that the recalling of stories of trauma risks wounding the listener but sides with the view of Levinas (1996 cited in Brison, 2002) that

there is a need to recall and tell those stories; a position that is another example of the idea of witnessing as an ethical act. Brison proposes that it is through the acts of narrating stories that it becomes possible to live a future that is not limited by the past. The quotation that appeared at the very start of this thesis summarises Brison's view on this capacity of storytelling to contribute to differently imagined futures and it is worth repeating here:

> It is only by remembering and narrating the past – telling our stories and listening to others' – that we can participate in an ongoing, active construction of a narrative of liberation, not one that confines us to a limiting past, but one that forms a background from which a freely imagined – and desired – future can emerge.
>
> (Brison, 2002, p 99)

The collective and creative quality of storytelling emerges strongly in this understanding, and the use of the idea of desire accords very well with the way in which Stoetzler and Yuval (2002) end their discussion of situated imagination, where they propose that there is the capacity for imagination to be turned towards ideas of pleasure and desire, with the suggestion that any imagined emancipatory or egalitarian future needs to be inclusive of experiences of pleasure and joy. Brison's (2002) conception of memories, trauma and story is used frequently throughout my discussion of women's stories and it will be seen how her philosophy has much to offer a personal and collective understanding of domestic violence.

There is then the potential to consider the joining together of imagination with autobiographical storytelling, and to relate this to considerations of the future. Where the embodied nature of imagination contributes to a capacity to imagine the future emerges is twofold. Within Gatens and Lloyd's review of Spinoza's philosophy of imagination, there is the statement that the 'bodily awareness of its [the mind] nature involves awareness of the past as well as the present and inevitably gives rise to expectations of the *contingent future'* (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.34, emphasis added). Morever, whilst thinking in detail about gender and embodiment, Paula-Irene Villa (2011), in a consideration and critique of intersectionality, writes that '[e]mbodiment is always fragile and transitory, never done' (p.179). For Villa the embodiment of gender is not about *being* female or being male, but is instead a process of *becoming* female or becoming male, further suggesting that this process of becoming is a complex on-going story in which individuals perform personal interpretations of collective ideas about gender – what Villa refers to as 'performative

mimesis' (p.180). Mimesis is here referring to corporeal acts of interpretation rather than just acts of mimicry, thus according with how it is understood within ethno-mimesis (O'Neill, 2010, 2009). Therefore, in Villa's understanding of embodiment, people become both what they imagine is expected of them but also, as already suggested by Stoetzler and Yuval (2002), what they desire for themselves. Those imaginings and desires are informed by complex and dynamic intersectional forces, with embodiment considered as a 'social process, expanding over time and space' (Villa, 2011, p.181). This expansion over time, following Spinoza's understanding of the corporeal nature of imagination, can be taken as pointing towards a view of the future being contingent upon embodied imagination that is capable of being expansive and dynamic. This is an important consideration given that the nature of my research is to enable participants to express their imagined futures, whilst acknowledging how that future will be contingent upon their past experiences of domestic violence.

If it is claimed then that an epistemology can be constructed within which imagination, autobiographical storytelling, and embodied knowledge are viewed as valid ways of thinking about responses to domestic violence, what limitations exist with such an epistemology? It is to this question that I now turn.

3.4   The limits of the epistemology

Starting with considerations about the limits of autobiographical storytelling, Radley (2009) makes the point that there is a potential conflict between using stories purely as a way of contemplating suffering, and using stories as part of an activist agenda for ideological reasons. Radley, using a pertinent example, repeats a recollection of researcher Catherine Reismann (2002 cited in Radley, 2009), who when writing about her experience of revisiting a participant's story of domestic violence, realises that in her original desire to find a positive end to the participant's story, failed to confront its full horror. Radley suggests that this example demonstrates 'the need for researchers to face up to difficult moments of witnessing, even where they are powerless to do anything about them at the time' (2009, p.65). This observation chimes with Frank's (1995) advocating for the need to pay attention to those stories about illness that do not have narrative arcs that end with either a cure or a quest fulfilled. Those 'moments of witnessing' that Radley identifies within a research context are reminiscent of what happens within the context of a therapeutic encounter, where therapists are encouraged to stay with the difficult memories, feelings and thoughts, rather than moving on too quickly to the finding of solutions (Leahmonth, 1994). The tension between

witnessing and activism is not the only problem that has been identified by those making use of first-person testimonies. Abrahams *et al* (2004) argue that first-person accounts and narratives, whilst bringing the lives of women closer to an audience and being valued by research participants, require careful ethical attention to issues of consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Elsewhere, the assumption that the inclusion of first-person accounts and testimonies automatically make for a more truthful text is critiqued for failing to acknowledge that there will always be some element of filtering, analysis and interpretation of participants' words; a process that places power and responsibility into the hands of researchers, academics and policy-makers (Letherby, 2003).

When considering autobiographies and works of art made in response to the author's or artist's serious illness, Radley (2009) highlights several criticisms that have been made about such texts and art works: that they are in some way anti-art and examples of 'victim art' (Croce, 1994 cited in Radley, 2009, p.18) when considered from the position of art criticism; and that they are a form of 'bad science' (p.27) when employed within the practice of social science. That first criticism, Radley observes, claims that such texts, performances and objects rely upon emotional sentiment and pity to communicate and engage with an audience, and as such they do not fit with the key Renaissance and Modernist definition of art being an act that transcends the experience of the individual in favour of the universal. A view that has similarity with the notion of reason being transcendent, as outlined earlier. Radley contrasts this criticism by pointing to Carol Oates' (Oates, 1997 cited in Radley, 2009) own response to the idea of 'victim art', stating that '[s]he argued that if art is too raw to be reviewed, shouldn't it be witnessed?' (p.20), adding that '[t]his plea raises the question of what art is for. Is it for review? Is it for social change? Is it for therapy?' (p.20).

This question of the purpose of art, when related to representations of illness, is probed further by Radley where it is argued that there is a tendency to both pathologize individual artists, and thus to view their art only through the lens of illness (Oates, 1998 cited in Radley 2009). It is also addressed in the criticism that representations of illness can end up making the subject other and devoid of self-consciousness (Crimp, 1992 cited in Radley, 2009). Both of which would seem to suggest that in spite of good intentions, if not made carefully, representations of illness, whether produced biographically or autobiographically, run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes, and the type of 'identity thinking' (O'Neill, 2008, no page) that places individuals and groups into easily discernible categories of victims and sufferers.

The second major criticism that Radley identifies, mostly in the writing of social scientist Paul Atkinson, is that first-person accounts, whether autobiographical or otherwise, do not take into account the historical context within which they emerge. The criticism that Radley identifies in Atkinson's analysis of narrative methods is that narrative autobiography, in elevating the individuals experience to the status of 'hyperauthenticity' (Atkinson, 1997, cited in Radley, 2009, p.27), de-contextualises that experience, whilst refusing to systematically analyse its contents, thereby failing to contribute anything meaningful to a sociologically-minded understanding of the topic at hand. When this happens within social science, it is, according to Atkinson, a form of bad science because it comes closer to the principles of an emancipatory therapy than it does to any systematic analysis of social experience. Reading Atkinson directly however reveals that he does not reject the narrative turn outright; rather, he argues that it ought not to be elevated to the extent that it overshadows all other forms of social analysis. What Atkinson advocates for is a mixed methodology: one that incorporates systematic analysis of different narrative perspectives (patients and medics within the field of study that Atkinson is concerned with) along with other forms of data gathering and analysis. Atkinson holds the view that too often individual narratives, and especially those of people who are considered to be sufferers or victims, are presented as giving the best, and perhaps only, access to an authentic truth; stating that '[i]t [narrative methodology] starts to transcend the realm of analytic methodology and becomes a surrogate form of liberal humanism and a romantic celebration of the individual subject' (Atkinson, 1997, p.335). For example, Atkinson accuses Frank of valorising the lay-person's narrative at the expense of the narrative employed by the medical professional, and that Frank therefore merely reverses the hierarchy of narratives, rather than systematically analysing their constructions and interactions or subjecting them to empirical testing.

The two criticisms identified are then that autobiographies of illness and suffering, in their supposed inability to transcend the individual or contextualise their account, fail to be neither good art nor good science. On the one hand, they lack the aesthetic distance that constitutes a valid work of art within Western civilization's conception of artistic merit (Kuspit, 1993). On the other hand, the failure to adequately take account of the context within which it was written, told, or shown, renders it incapable of being systematically analysed and evaluated.

Radley's own response to the debate about the problem of representations of illness in art is to state that:

> [f]ar from separating art and illness, there is much to be gained from allowing them to travel over each other's territory. I say 'travel' because it keeps open the options, does not reach for closure so that, for example, art is deemed 'good for illness' or equally that illness is necessarily thought to be 'good for art'
>
> (Radley, 2009, p.21)

Whilst he responds to the argument that the value of autobiography and narrative is overstated within sociology by repeating Frank's defence of his own position, in saying that the use of first-person accounts within medicine is an ethical rather than an empirical concern (Frank, 2000 cited in Radley 2009). This ethical concern is, Radley argues, about witnessing, listening and watching, in a sustained and engaged way that allows for the development of an open-ended relationship between story-teller and audience. It is a position that 'must always be about engagement rather than distance' (Radley, 2009, p.30). In this way the argument about a lack of transcendence becomes a positive quality.

Turning to a consideration of the limits of imagination, the key criticism is that it does not inherently or automatically provide empathic insight into what is not-self, but rather is prone to distortion and delusion when unanalysed. Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis (2002) make just this point by again drawing upon Spinoza's philosophy and his emphasis upon the danger of illusion and fantasy, stating that '[t]he imagination is the source of freedom, change and emancipation as much as a source of the borders and boundaries that emancipation wants to challenge'(p.324). Similarly, Carla Rice (2009), in considering the ethics of writing about women's embodied lives, discusses the dangers of making assumptions about the empathic and illuminating possibilities of imagination and of trying to cross the 'unbridgeable space between self and other' (p.260). Ann Murphy (2012), building upon Michéle Le Doeuff's (2002) examination of the denial of imagination and imagery within philosophy, argues that it is vulnerability that makes us more open to others, to their corporeal, ontological and ethical alterity, and to thus enable empathic responses. However, that corporeal vulnerability can just as easily provoke a retreat from what is imagined to be not-self in fear and repulsion. Imagination, and its association to the vulnerable body, thus becomes a source of wounding and violence as well as a prompt for caring and compassion. In Murphy's view, both vulnerability and imagination occupy ambiguous positions within philosophy: something to be drawn back from as well as something to be approached. Murphy talks of an 'emergent feminist ontology of corporeal vulnerability' (p.99) and considers the implications of an

ethics based upon vulnerability, where the ambiguous nature of vulnerability is embraced rather than denied so that the beneficial components of care and compassion do not become 'concealed by [vulnerability's] overwhelming association with violence' (p.98) that so much philosophy espouses. In this way Murphy calls attention to the way in which images of violence permeate philosophical accounts of identity and difference, and instead argues for a conception of self and otherness that is based upon an interdependence that is ambiguous and vulnerable. As such, any idea of an emancipatory future (of the sort that feminism might imagine) would be required to acknowledge the ambiguity that is inherent within corporeal vulnerability and its associated influence upon imagination, rather than to attempt to transcend it.

Murphy's work is important here both because of her attention to violence within philosophical imagination but also in how she encourages a critical thinking through of the kinds of imagery that are used to describe both identity and the future. Her attention to vulnerability proves to be helpful in thinking through the development of research relationships and the place of imagination and creativity within the methodology. By paying attention to these concerns it becomes possible to consider how an 'emergent feminist ontology of corporeal vulnerability' (p.99) might think through experiences of domestic violence and how the participants of my research imagined their futures.

Having argued that imagination, embodiment and story are legitimate epistemologies within domestic violence research I know turn to a consideration of the development of arts-based methods within contemporary research design.

3.5   A brief history of arts-based research methods

The historical use of visual images within sociological research has been covered extensively by a number of writers (Spencer 2011; MacDougall, 2006; Prosser, 1998), with Pink (2007a) identifying how the use of visual data within ethnography has moved from a position of controversy, where its specificity and subjectivity was questioned, to a position where it is possible to write that '[t]he challenge for visual anthropology as it re-establishes itself in the twenty first century is no longer the question of whether it will be accepted by the mainstream, but of how to connect with and contribute to mainstream anthropological debates' (p.12). This shift in acceptance has come about because of the challenges to positivist conceptions of truth; a challenge that leads Denzin and Lincoln to claim that '[w]e are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new

experiential works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation' (2005 cited in Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008, p.1). Denzin and Lincoln's words encapsulate methodological responses to the uncertainties and anxieties around claims to truth that have arisen within contemporary Western culture. Within sociological and ethnographic texts this anxiety emerges in what has been termed a crisis of representation, that in turn has promoted new ways of doing research that have been referred to as new paradigm research. Susan Finley (2003), summarising the work of Lincoln (1995, cited in Finley, 2003) writes that new paradigm research has the following three commitments:

> first, to deep participant and researcher interactions and involvements; second, to professional, personal, and political actions that might improve participants' lives; and third, to future-oriented work that is based in a visionary perspective that encompasses social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse, and caring.
>
> (p.282)

These new forms aim to widen the scope of research in terms of who can participate, how people participate, and what actions emerge from that participation. Positionality, community, voice, reflexivity and reciprocity, are, Finley (2003) points out, all standards of new paradigm qualitative research. I would argue that each of these commitments and standards also align closely to the principles of feminist standpoint epistemology and research.

Recent developments within arts-based methods and visual sociology have included: acknowledgement of the local and contextual nature of photography and other visual forms (MacDougall, 1998; Pink, 2007a); performance within the construction and dissemination of ethnographic storytelling (Jones, 2006); the incorporation of sensory narratives within ethnographic and biographic research (Mason & Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009, 2004; MacDougall, 2006); arts-based enquiry as political activism (Finley, 2005); and the synthesis of art therapy and social action (Huss, 2013; Kaplan, 2007). Examples of the synthesis of art practice, collaboration and partnership includes work with refugees and migrants that advocates for the transformative role of the arts within a methodology that has an explicit objective of social action and democracy (O'Neill, 2010; O'Neill & Harindranath, 2006). Approaches such as those practised by O'Neill try to meet PARs aim of incorporating

different ways of knowing into the collection, analysis and dissemination of research evidence; an approach that 'seeks to go beyond orthodox empirical and rational Western views of knowing, and assert a multiplicity of ways of knowing that start from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition' (Seeley & Reason, 2008, p.28). This sense of multiplicity is an important one, as has been identified already in thinking about imagination and feminist standpoint theory, and is one that fits with the ways in which visual imagery within research can be situated. At one point when discussing the development of visual ethnography David MacDougall (2006) writes about the historical emergence of cinematic imagination that was preceded by and founded upon stereoscopic imagination, that itself was a product of nineteenth century experiments with stereoscopic photographs which mimicked the depth of field of normal binocular vision (see figure 3.1). Thinking through how stereoscopy changed the relationship between audience and images, MacDougall writes that

> stereoscopy created a new aesthetic in which the object of the photograph (and, in a sense, the viewer, too) was fragmented and decentered. Single objects were part of an integrated complex of objects at different planes, which both receded from and invaded the space of the viewer . . . . the viewer is physically implicated in the scene as an observer positioned spatially in relation to every other object.
>
> (p.248-9)

Fragmentation, decentring and positionality are precisely the kinds of qualities that a feminist standpoint epistemology values, and to my mind makes stereoscopic imagination a pertinent metaphor for the act of holding together different forms of knowledge and positions, with the viewer being crucial to the construction of meaning. It is a metaphor that is also reflected in Laurel Richardson's remarks about ways of evaluating new-paradigm ethnography where she writes that the '[c]reative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified' (2000, p.254). It also aligns with Ehprat Huss' claim that 'we must learn to wear multiple glasses' (2013, p.52) and to accommodate competing perspectives when attempting to hold together the use of visual images within practices that merge the agendas of research, therapy and social action. Thought about in these ways, visual images, when used in a complementary or oppositional way with the written word, can enable multiple

representations to co-exist, and allow the kind of ambiguous and tentative representations of situated and partial truths to emerge that have been argued for within this thesis. In terms of domestic violence, this means allowing arts-based representations to be placed alongside traditional quantitative and qualitative representations.

Figure 3.1: Example of Victorian Stereoscope

(Source: http://users.telenet.be/thomasweynants/stereo-images.html - accessed 17/6/13)

A crucial feature of visual art is identified made by Elizabeth Chaplin (1994), who argues in her investigation of the place of the visual arts within sociological research, that art can be considered as a 'deposit of a social relationship' (p.164) and thus of social alliances and divisions. Chaplin sets out her view early on when she writes that 'representations articulate not only visual or verbal codes and conventions but also the social practices and forces which underlie them, with which we interpret the world' (p.1). It is a view that is reflected in Kip Jones' (2006) view of art being a social phenomenon rather than purely a reflection of individual psychologies, so that as a visual and performative researcher he is able to argue for adopting a view of art that is far more concerned with how it reflects social relationships than with how it reflects individual and private experience. Chaplin points out that there is little to distinguish between words and images in terms of how meaning is socially constructed, and that it is the accumulation of sequences of images and the way in which they are spoken about that creates meaning around them. This is a view I concur with and identified myself when investigating bilingual art therapy (Bird, 2011), discovering that meaning in such encounters comes about not through universal signs and symbols, but rather through the shared construction of meaning made over time by a client and a therapist. What this view of art as a means of representing social relationships allows for, is the possibility for the

consideration of art being a performative expression of intersecting social forces such as gender, class or ethnicity. It also suggests that representations can contribute to re-thinking the relationship between those forces.

3.6   Arts-based research and imagination

A strong theme that emerges from the growing body of knowledge around participatory, emancipatory, arts-based and sense-based research is the place of imagination, the value and limits of which have been outlined earlier in this chapter. It appears in a loose way in Denzin's (2000) writing about the potential of qualitative research texts to imagine different futures, and it appears in a more explicit way during Finley's (2003) thinking around the development of the evaluation of new paradigm research processes where she writes that '[p]erformance requires some sort of imaginative interpretation of events and the contexts of their occurrence' (p.287). Imagination appears as part of a clearly stated process of inquiry when generating presentational knowledge, such as images and objects that are made as a response to experiential knowledge (Seeley & Reason, 2008), where it is suggested that researchers suspend quick intellectual responses and instead invite 'imaginative impulses to express themselves through the media of our bodies without our intellects throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique' (p.33).

For bell hooks (1995) imagination is used as a way of countering restricted critical readings of works of art; readings that she considers overemphasise direct experience in the formation of works of art. For example, in her consideration of the representation of the history of black artists, and the way in which art made by black artists is often only interpreted by critics (mostly white and mostly men) as representing an actual lived 'black' experience, she makes a powerful argument for focusing upon and valuing the appearance of imagination within works of art: of what is mysterious and mythic and of what has not been personally experienced but collectively imagined. Thus, the myths of the community and the family contribute to the work of art as much as direct experience or reason.

It is the case then that imagination is at this present time considered a legitimate way within which to engage with research. Furthermore, if feminist standpoint theory, in its attempts to address gendered identity thinking, is interested in generating knowledge that emerges from more than one position, it is possible to also say that it values different forms and expression of knowledge: verifiable observation, direct personal experience, and

imagination. Furthermore, building upon how I have presented the case for imagination, alongside storytelling and embodiment, forming a legitimate epistemology that could underpin domestic violence research, I argue that it is the potential for the inclusion and valuing of imagination within feminist standpoint theory that provides a strong link between it and the use of the arts within a methodology designed to investigate domestic violence. It is this synthesis of epistemologies and methodologies within the study of domestic violence that gives this thesis its uniqueness.

3.7   Types of arts-based research

It is worth considering the subtle differences that appear within literature regarding the relationship between researcher, participants and the production and contemplation of artistic works. The distinctions to be drawn are primarily to do with who makes the images, or enacts artistic performances, that appear within research. There is a spectrum of what might be classed as being arts-based research. At one end of this spectrum is research that involves the investigation of pre-existing images or performances; what is more commonly referred to as visual sociology, visual ethnography or visual studies (Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011; Stanczak, 2007). These pre-existing artefacts might be used to elicit responses from participants, with research about women viewers' responses to representations of violence against women, as conducted by Schlesinger *et al* (1992), falling into this category. Moving along the spectrum is research where images are employed as documentary evidence; photography and video, for example. This might segue into researchers employing more interpretative forms of documentation; drawing for example, either using their own abilities or that of a trained artist (Afonso & Ramos, 2004). Dawn Mannay's (2013) use of poetry to represent women's spoken words about their sense of safety and danger is an example of the researcher using art to interpret experiences that are related to domestic violence. Such documentation might be informed and directed by research participants, and forms the kind of research conducted by Pink, where she uses walking interviews and video to document a participant's sense of place (Pink, 2007b). Researchers may choose to engage more fully with artistic expressions so that they use their own art-making to explore their imaginative, embodied and felt responses to whatever it is they are researching. This researcher-made art is close to the idea of reflexivity, that art therapist and arts-based researcher Shaun McNiff (2012) classes as one of the defining features of arts-based research because it shows that the researcher truly values the worth of art within their own engagement with research. Moving further along the spectrum

is found that research where research participants create arts-based documentary or interpretive evidence for themselves; evidence which might contribute to the elicitation of spoken or written responses. Photo-elicitation techniques, of the kind displayed within the *Framing Safety* project (Frohmann, 2005), would sit within this category. Occasionally, such research might involve participants collaborating with trained artists to create images or performances. The *Hope* exhibition (http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net) that was introduced in the Chapter 2 comes close to this kind of work, although it lacked the academic credentials necessary to be considered rigorous research and so is better thought of as a community arts project.

The version of arts-based research that incorporates participants making images and performances is one that reflects the kind of research conducted by O'Neill (2010) and fits well with the principles of PAR. O'Neill (2010) outlines the principles of PAR where she synthesises them with arts-based methods in the form of Participatory Arts (PA) to explore issues of migration and asylum. These principles are: respect for the knowledge of participants; receptivity of narratives that run counter to elitist meta-narratives; the researcher not relying on their own culture when making interpretations but instead seeking out localised values; and disseminating what is discovered in ways that are meaningful in different ways other than just purely the academic. It is when PAR is related to the kinds of arts-based research that is participatory that O'Neill is able to employ what she refers to as an ethno-mimetic approach to research, stating that

> [r]esearch methodologies, such as PAR, that create spaces for the voices and images of the subaltern . . . through narrative methods that are rigorously ethical can serve not only to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes and hegemonic practices, but can produce critical texts that may mobilise and create 'real' change.
>
> (p.102)

O'Neill has demonstrated that such methodologies can be employed effectively when working alongside people who have experienced issues of asylum and migration. I argue that because of how PAR and PA give a voice to those usually silenced and enable change they fit with the principles of feminist standpoint theory and feminist activism and are therefore a suitable method of understanding women's experiences of domestic violence within this research.

As will be outlined in Chapter 4, the version of arts-based research I have developed here is one that required participants to be the producers of visual images, with those images being used to elicit discussions about domestic violence.

3.8 Ethical debates within arts-based research

Where O'Neill writes of a method that is 'rigorously ethical' (p.102), this necessitates consideration of the particular ethical points that arise within arts-based research. The rapid expansion of interest in arts-based and participatory methodologies has required the critical re-thinking of ethical concerns within research, particularly where art-making is considered as having the potential to evoke intimacy and vulnerability between participants, researchers and viewers (Rumbold, Fenner & Brophy-Dixon, 2012). A common theme that emerges within those texts that devote themselves to thinking about the ethical implications of these newer methodologies is how to reconcile a desire for community participation and dissemination with the need to protect autonomy and to manage the interpretation of data. Respondents may be experts at creating images within a situated social relationship, but how those images will be received by a wider audience is less certain. As Rose Wiles (2008) states, '[o]ne of the difficulties with visual data is that images tend to be viewed as representations of social reality but are inevitably constructions of a social reality that are influenced by the attributes of both the researcher and subject' (p.33). This means that the subtlety of how and where an image was made will be lost if presented out of context, and audiences may interpret images in ways not intended by the makers because audiences will be situated also. For instance, in the example given in Chapter 2 of the community-arts exhibition HOPE[11],the limited contextual detail supplied assumed a certain amount of pre-existing knowledge of domestic violence to appreciate its message. However, this potential lack of a precise reading might be considered in a positive light and to be an example of where 'the products of [arts-based] research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions' (Eisner, 2008 cited in Rumbold, Fenner & Brophy-Dixon, 2012, p.70). That dialogue is one that can take place between participants and researcher during the making of images, it is also one that can be encouraged to take place between the disseminated work and the audience. As McNiff writes, when thinking about images within art therapy, '[w]e have reached a point in psychotherapeutic history where it is imperative to liberate images from ourselves and restore the reality of

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[11] http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net/?page_id=1105 (accessed 28/3/13)

imagination as a procreative and life-enhancing function' (1991, p.278). What McNiff argues for is that images be allowed to have an autonomous life of their own that transcends fixed and immediate interpretations, and instead allow ourselves to dialogue with images in imaginative ways. Such an attitude, for McNiff, is an ethical one as it encourages attention to what is not self. By this he also means paying attention to those aspects of ourselves that we might not always be aware of, and thus consider external to ourselves.

There is perhaps then an ethical conflict between on the one hand viewing images as being situated and requiring verbal explanation to avoid misinterpretation, and on the other hand approaching images as autonomous entities that can be imaginatively dialogued with. For myself, returning to the ideas expressed earlier when considering the epistemological foundations of my research helps to hold these two positions in mind simultaneously; in particular the notion that imagination, being situated and embodied, can be employed collectively to help form an approximated truth. That truth might be ambiguous but it attempts to take account of different perspectives and set up a dialogue between them.

As well as problems of interpretation, it is argued that no complete guarantee of participant anonymity unless completely sanitized images are to be produced, which in turn runs the risk of de-contextualising and de-situating the images (Clark, 2006). The danger of images not being wholly anonymous applies as much to drawings or collage as it does to photography or video, where images are made and used that could only be produced by a particular individual. Figure 3.2 is an example taken from literature of a family being easily identified within a small community where a child drew a picture clearly showing the mother as having only one leg. Wiles (2008) points out how participants need to be made aware of these issues, adding that because community dissemination has different consequences to academic dissemination consent needs to become a process rather than an event. This view is echoed elsewhere (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008; Prosser & Loxley, 2008), where it is claimed that arts-based researchers should adopt a situated ethical code when making use of visual data, meaning that researchers must work hard to negotiate with participants about the appropriate use of images that takes account of local and cultural contexts.

Within my own research, as well as adopting a situated approach, I also adopted an *ethics of care* approach, within which 'ethical decisions are made on the basis of care, compassion and a desire to act in ways that benefit the individual or group who are the focus of research' (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008, p.22) rather than ethics being regarded as a bureaucratic barrier. The way in which these thoughts about ethics materialise in my own study will become clearer in Chapter 4 when discussing the recruitment of participants and

when reflecting upon the outcome of the research. Problems of interpretation and dissemination in arts-based research, when combined with the potential vulnerability of the participants and the complex issue of me being a male researcher, meant that the ethical component of this project were at the very core of its existence and informed much of my reflexive engagement with the research process.

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 3.2: My Family

(Source: Prosser & Loxley, 2008)

3.9   Evaluation of arts-based research

Research ethics is not only about ensuring that harm does not come to participants, it is also about ensuring that the research will have benefit and is of value. It is important therefore to consider how my own research might be evaluated. The question of evaluation when using an arts-based and participatory method requires particular attention, and given that such methodologies cannot easily rely upon positivist notions of replication and generalization, there have been various suggestions as to how it might be possible to say if a given piece of research has value and validity. A special edition of *Qualitative Inquiry* in 2000 was devoted to just this question in relation to new paradigm methodologies in general. In that issue, Denzin (2000) argues for research that brings about democratic change, putting forward four questions to ask of such research: does it show rather than tell? Does it illuminate injustices?

Does it make use of symbolism and rhetoric? And the question that I have already examined more than once: does it imagine how things can be different? In the same issue of *Qualitative Inquiry,* Laura Richardson (2000) provides five criteria by which new paradigm products can be evaluated. These are that the work should exhibit the following: substantive contribution to understanding; aesthetic merit that is engaging and complex; researcher reflexivity and accountability to research subjects; impact upon the audience - including the generation of questions; expression of a reality that feels embodied and 'true' for the subject.

In a later issue of *Qualitative Inquiry*, Susan Finley (2003) explores the diversity of opinion that exists and the lack of a fixed standard of evaluation that is related to the way science or art is evaluated. Finley suggests that because arts-based and participatory research so often fits within the new paradigm approach to research, issues of validity, reliability, generalizability, craftsmanship, artistry and expertise are not appropriate and that there is perhaps no need for a fixed set of criteria by which to evaluate such research. She does though propose some questions that an audience can ask which includes asking if the researcher allowed themselves to be researched by participants and to what extent the work demonstrates passion and poses questions. Elsewhere, Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (2006), in considering ways of evaluating arts-based research within education, set forth more concrete criteria. These are: does the research have a clarifying and illuminating effect? Does it generate questions for the audience? Does it exhibit incisiveness and relevance to contemporary problems? Does it have generalizability to things outside of the research undertaken?

The question of generalizability is the most pressing evaluation issue facing any piece of arts-based research, especially given the usually small number of participants in such research and the inability to apply the principles of randomization and repeatability. Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010) usefully provides an alternative way of thinking about generalizability by proposing that where qualitative research is contextual and works with a small number of participants then the idea of 'particularizability' (p.15) is a more suitable measure. By this she means how research might resonate 'with people in other situations so that they are able to find both confirmation and/or new understandings of experiences and phenomena' (p.15). In my research this translates into considering how the results chime with, illuminate, and extend findings from more traditional qualitative research: does it provide a partial, situated and approximated truth that can be added to those other partial truths about domestic violence?

Viewing generalizability within arts-based research as being about resonance rather than weight of numbers is repeated by Barone and Eisner (2012) where they defend the view that within arts-based research an *n* of 1 is acceptable. Using the example of the novel they point out that novels 'are not random samples of someone's life but generalize by providing an image, a picture, a narrative that stand for situations like it' (p.170). In this way the novel might reflect and illuminate what is already known by the reader but also do the same for what is not yet known. The same can be argued for the painting or the poem or any other piece of creative art. Pink's (2007a) photographic work with small numbers of participants, including one study focusing upon a female Spanish bull-fighter, clearly demonstrates that insightful and illuminating research can be conducted with limited numbers of participants. As a range of researchers and academics have indicated, the choice of how many respondents is enough is dependent upon the context of the study and the quality of the answers received and the kind of analysis applied (Baker & Rosalind, 2012). As will be shown, when discussing in a more detailed way the design and implementation of the research, this question of what makes for an appropriate number of participants to render the research acceptable is one that I had to address, but it was an issue that was guided by reference to the responses to generalizability just outlined.

Whilst the range of criteria set out here are wide ranging they can be applied to the consideration of arts-based domestic violence research. In particular Barone and Eisner's (2006) criteria would seem to apply equally well to domestic violence as it does to education. However a criterion such as Richardson's (2000) focus upon aesthetic merit fits less well – certainly within this research where the emphasis is more upon generating visual images as data than it is upon generating visual images for public consumption. The various criteria presented, whilst not providing a definitive set of criteria, do have common points that can guide evaluation. These are: equality and transparency between participants and researcher; imaginatively engaging audiences, illuminating social realities, generating questions and resonance with other research. For this research, those common themes of evaluation are the ones that I shall be applying in Chapter 9, paying particular attention to how they translate into thinking about domestic violence; for example how do the visual responses illuminate the reality of domestic violence and how do they confirm or challenging existing discourses?

3.10 Reflexivity, gender and art

The evaluation criterion of equality and transparency between participants and research leads onto the important consideration of reflexivity. Chaplin (1994) draws attention to two types of reflexivity: meta-reflexivity and infra-reflexivity. Meta-reflexivity, she equates with a very inward-facing version of reflexivity in which the experience of the researcher takes centre stage to the detriment of participants' voices. In contrast, infra-reflexivity achieves its reflexivity through multiple forms of presentation: telling and showing for example within an arts-based process. Drawing upon Latour (1988, cited in Chaplin, 1994), she writes that an infra-reflexive text 'obtains its reflexivity from its style rather than from deploying any pre-conceived theoretical framework' (p.269). The infra-reflexive text moves back forth between points of view; and like a novel, the infra-reflexive text draws attention to multiple readings of experiences, leaving room for the reader to resonate with the text. Infra-reflexivity is therefore a version of reflexivity that fits well with my research, that includes both visual and verbal representations of responses to domestic violence made by participants, along with the reactions of participants and myself to those representations.

As well as introducing the notion of particularizability, Butler-Kisber (2010) considers also how the concepts of validity and repeatability that exist within quantitative research, can be translated within qualitative research to notions of researcher transparency, acknowledgement of situated positions and reflexivity. Denzin (2000) points out that, along with attention to participation and multiple ways of knowing, the position and subjective response of the researcher to that which they are engaged with forms a key element of contemporary research. Within feminist standpoint theory, reflexive attention to the researcher's subjective and situated knowledge is a key component of the aim of placing the lives and experiences of participants centrally within knowledge production. Harding's (2004) claim that empiricism overvalues objective reasons at the same time as downplaying subjective, emotional and embodied knowledge has already been introduced. Harding goes further by suggesting that the traditional way in which objectivity has been conceived and applied is a weak form of objectivity because it rarely, if ever, acknowledges the historical or situated nature of the object of enquiry or the subjectivity of the researcher. It is only when the researcher acknowledges her own standpoint and situated position, and that of the people whom she is working with, that a stronger form of objectivity emerges. It is, Harding argues, through rigorous and strong reflexivity and the accommodation of different perspectives, that more value-conscious forms of what she terms 'strong objectivity' are generated. In this way

the 'subject of knowledge can be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge' (2004, p.136). Harding here is particularly addressing the notion of objectivity within the sciences, but the idea is just as applicable to the humanities and the arts.

Reflexivity is then a key element within the methodologies I make use of. In particular it is necessary to think about what it means to be a male researcher studying women's experience of domestic violence and how I relate to feminism. Politically, conducting this study without recourse to feminist principles would be unimaginable. Given that the positive developments within social and legal attitudes towards domestic violence have only been possible because of those activists and researchers who have explicitly aligned themselves with feminism, to not acknowledge and engage with feminism when researching any aspect of domestic violence would I argue be to work in a very limited way, ignorant of the gendered forces that enable domestic violence, and of the ways of countering those forces. Jeff Hearn (1998) for example states that the male researcher, if engaged in researching any aspect of men's violence towards women, must ensure that research is not planned and conducted in isolation from feminism, as to do so is likely to 'reproduce some of the 'knowledge' of anti-feminism' (p.43). Hearn also identifies an epistemological problem when men study violence against women; a problem that centres on the gendered valuing of objective and subjective knowledge. Hearn claims that there is a complex relationship between experience, knowledge, theory and politics; writing that '[i]n many respects, men's knowledge as researchers . . . remains *severely* limited by virtue of men's power locations as members of an oppressor class . . . relative to women's knowledge of the *effects* of men.' (p.42, original emphasis). As a way of addressing this complexity and the gendered valuing of knowledge, Hearn advocates for the 'linking together of fragments of knowledge' (p.42). Similar issues have been addressed by David Beecham (2009) who has researched women's experience of domestic violence. However, whilst Beecham argues that there is a danger of over-simplifying the relationship between gender and power by creating a polarised view of the oppressors and the oppressed, his suggestion that the researcher 'should acknowledge that all knowledge is situated and that there is value to 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives' (p.6) complements the linking together of fragments of knowledge advocated by Hearn as well as legitimising the place of male researchers within the study of women's experiences of domestic violence . Hearn and Beecham both employ feminist thought to help manage being a male researcher investigating domestic violence, paying particular attention to the effects of gender upon knowledge production and values whilst suggesting the adoption of an inclusive attitude towards the emergence of different types and expressions of knowledge. As I have

argued already, this acknowledgment and valuing of different types and expressions of knowledge, including imagination and visual knowledge, forms a vital element of feminist standpoint theory and legitimises its use within my own methodology.

In terms of how being a man informed my engagement with women participants I began the project with some trepidation, being mindful of my gender and concerned that it would either hinder recruitment or be detrimental to participants. This anxiety was tempered somewhat by my previous work as an art therapist, which had shown that being a male therapist was not an automatic barrier to women taking part in projects facilitated by myself where domestic violence was the focus. As Mannay (2010) usefully observes, whilst the prescribing of who is an insider or an outsider might be problematic and imprecise, 'to ignore questions of proximity is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing researchers to become an abstract concept rather than a site of accountability' (p.92). Accountability meant acknowledging that I was a man investigating women's responses to domestic violence, the majority of which would have been perpetrated by men. However, being a male researcher investigating women's experiences of domestic violence has been challenged from a feminist perspective. Writing twenty-five years ago, Belinda Kremer (1990) argued that at that time men might engage in research that was sympathetic to feminist aims and objectives but it could not be called feminist research, stating that 'feminist research is for women, who must guard and celebrate the power to name and to claim it, remembering that the claiming of these spaces, meanings, and struggles is part of our creation of ourselves' (p.467). Such a view could be countered by arguing that in light of intersectionality and transgender politics, the appeal to 'ourselves' is too universalist to be meaningful. As Beecham (2009) points out, the notion of who is an insider and who is an outsider is a contested idea, but Kremer is right to be cautious about who is producing knowledge about those experiences affecting women.

In comparison to Kremer, Harry Brod (1998) argues that the label feminist, when adopted by men individually, communicates best the strength of their support and engagement with feminism, more so than a hyphenated or de-hyphenated profeminism, whilst acknowledging that it runs the risk of 'men co-opting women's identities and struggles' (p.207). Brod further argues that the hyphen potentially distances men from a full political engagement with the aims of feminism by suggesting the adoption of only a supportive position, rather than a more fuller emotional and intellectual willingness to contribute to conversations about gender and power and take action accordingly. Writing in 2014, conducting research informed by feminist principles and supported by a feminist

organization, I feel that it is legitimate to claim that I am a feminist and that I am conducting feminist research. A different context might preclude me from using those terms.

An important historical point to make about feminist standpoint theory is that its development was a response to what philosophers of science who were grounded in feminist ideas identified as the androcentric production and valuing of knowledge within the sciences, including the social sciences (Yeatman, 1994). Earlier in this chapter I introduced the idea that throughout most of the history of Western philosophy reason has been variously described in terms associated with masculinity, and explicitly constructed to exclude women from the practice of philosophy and the attainment of reason (Lloyd, 1993). It was argued that reason has been constructed in relationship with, and in opposition to, the concepts of nature, emotions and the domestic; all of which have been associated with the feminine. An interesting parallel and inconsistency emerges where these associations are compared to the way in which the identity of the artist within the eighteenth century was constructed around the idea of untamed nature and of the non-domestic, only this time the associations are used with the explicit purpose of excluding women artists from historical accounts of high art whilst simultaneously confining women's work to the less valued practice of the crafts (Pollock & Parker, 1981). It would be unwise here to make too many direct comparisons between the philosophy of science and art history, or to link different historical epochs; rather, the important point to note is how a gendered metaphor ('nature' in this example) can be called upon in different and contradictory ways depending upon the needs of the dominant group at a given time: male philosophers of the classical, medieval and renaissance world, and male artists of the romantic movement. What these two examples from philosophy and art illustrate is how different types of knowledge production and representation have been associated very explicitly with gender, and re-enforces the idea that visual art is both a personal expression and a socially situated act (Huss, 2013; Chaplin, 1994).

In order to further explore the relationship between knowledge, gender and art I want to consider MacDougall's (2006, 1998) influence upon the development of ethnographic practices that incorporate sense-based data and knowledge (Pink, 2009, 2007a;). MacDougall advocates for an ethnography that values all of the senses due to the synaesthetic quality of perception; meaning the way in which one sense impression can be triggered by another. These ideas are complex and wide ranging, but there is one instance in particular that is pertinent to my own enquiries, and whilst the reference point in the coming discussion is photography, there is enough of a parallel to other art-forms to make it valid.

MacDougall states that behind every camera there is a body. The photographic act is a physical and reflexive one that always involves choices and is never a neutral event. Within photography and film the image is 'framed' and 'made' rather than 'taken'. As such, the photographer is making an image of herself or himself and of that which she or he hopes to represent. Equally, every viewer has a body, whose own interpretation will be as much about themselves as that which is encountered. However, MacDougall makes the claim that whilst interpretation is inevitable there is an 'irreducible part of a photographic image that escapes from us' (MacDougall, 2006, p.3) so that visual knowledge – knowledge of embodied beings – struggles within those academic traditions that seek to construct fixed conclusions. My gender is an important component of my identity as a reflexive researcher, but is only one component of an interdependent mix of factors, where the definition of being male is not entirely fixed. Whilst great sensitivity was required in my responses to the representations of domestic violence made by participants, I was not precluded from entering into an interpretive dialogue with those representations where imagination was considered to be a legitimate source of knowing and as a contributor to a multiplicity of responses.

Bearing in mind then the points made by MacDougall, along with the ideas presented within Chapter 2 to do with intersectionality, it is important to also consider how my gendered position is co-existent with other components of my identity: ethnicity, sexuality, economic status and health for example. As a white, heterosexual, middle-aged, professionally employed man, I occupy a privileged position within many of the social encounters I might have within my day-to-day existence. Much of that privilege is likely to be taken into research encounters, no matter how much I might attempt to deny or ignore it. The potential to be perceived as privileged and as an embodiment of patriarchal power by participants is significant, and the likelihood of that privilege, both real and imagined, influencing participation is more than possible. This potential for influence is exacerbated by the knowledge that participants might have had of my status as an art therapist, and of what that entails in terms of power dynamics. This attention to power within research relationships is important in terms of questioning the link between power and knowledge within feminist research (Letherby, 2003), the possibility of participants feeling under-skilled within arts-based research (Packard, 2008), the need to ensure that women's voices are fully heard (Hague & Mullender, 2005), and the close proximity between researching domestic violence and counselling in terms of managing disclosure (Abrahams *et al*, 2004).

3.11 Summary

Because of the uniqueness of an arts-based method of investigating domestic violence it has been fundamentally necessary to explore the associated epistemological issues in detail. Imagination, I have argued, can be a legitimate epistemology within domestic violence research. A selection of philosophical positions, primarily from a feminist tradition, have been presented that cast imagination in a favourable light as well as suggesting that its frequent downgrading within Western philosophy is a consequence of the relegation of the body to an epistemological position that is to be transcended and escaped from. As well as the presentation of the idea that imagination is situated, I have argued that it is embodied, inter-subjective and closely related to the process of reason. When associated with acts of autobiographical storytelling it has the potential to enable empathic understanding between people and to make the future accessible. In this way, imagination meets the aims of an emancipatory politics that informs much feminist thought and action, including responses to gender-based violence, and thus to domestic violence. It is useful within feminist-standpoint methods, where the privileged position of the researcher is challenged, and the lives of subjects valued highly.

The work of Spinoza has proven useful to considering how imagination might be beneficial to such an aim, but his own caution about the dangers of illusion leads onto considering the limitations of an epistemology based upon imagination. The limitations that have been identified include a lack of context (Radley, 2009), as well as ambiguity about its ability to provide empathic understanding due to its associations with vulnerability (Murphy, 2012). The ambiguity that Murphy identifies within ideas of imagination can also be applied to ideas of embodiment and autobiography when, as has been argued, they are all situated temporally, corporeally and politically. This ambiguity means that there is no guaranteed or privileged access to other people's experiences when employing such an epistemology, nor does the epistemology guarantee empathic contemplation or emancipatory responses.

A potential way in which to approach imagination and story in a critical way, that both values their situated nature as well as acknowledging their limits, is offered by the notion of knowledge that comes about through collectives and networks, and which acknowledges both the similarities and the differences that might exist between research participants, researchers and pre-existing knowledge. In this way it is possible to arrive at a position where, through the analysis of different narratives that Atkinson (1997) advocates for, there can be an act of '[a]pproximating the truth' (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.315)

rather than an assumption of accessing truth via a privileged and transcendent position. As will be presented in the next chapter where I outline the methodology employed within this research, bringing participants together to create an approximated truth forms a crucial element. Autobiographical accounts and imagination may be situated, embodied, and ambiguous, but following the philosophical consideration of their contribution to ontology and to ethics it is clear that they are crucial to an understanding of responses to domestic violence in the past, the present and, crucially, in the future - a future, that whilst being uncertain and ambiguous, holds out the possibility for both emancipation and pleasure (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

The literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2 identified the potential for art to be a valid method of engaging participants in research and in enacting an activist agenda. It also identified that the future is an under-appreciated field of enquiry within domestic violence studies. This chapter has argued for the legitimacy of imagination as an epistemology where contemplation of the future is required, with autobiographical storytelling and embodiment contributing to that legitimacy, whilst arts-based research, it has been shown, is an appropriate means of enacting such an epistemology, particularly so given art's material and fictive qualities. Furthermore, it has been argued that arts-based research, when synthesised with feminist methods of enquiry, offers a legitimate means of investigating domestic violence. Part of that argument has centred upon the need for researchers to acknowledge their position and to this end time has been spent considering how reflexivity, and imagination, can be used to manage being a male researcher investigating domestic violence. The following chapter will address more fully how these ideas translate into a workable methodology for the investigation of women's responses to experiences of domestic violence.

4 : Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Having established that an arts-based approach to making visible women's experiences of domestic violence, including paying attention to the future, is a legitimate research aim, and having established that imagination, and its association to embodied storytelling, offers a valid epistemology, this chapter is concerned with setting forth how those ideas translate into a workable methodology. This chapter builds upon Chapter 3 by demonstrating, in practical ways, how an arts-based methodology can be synthesised with a feminist standpoint approach to research, in order to bring forth imaginative responses to experiences of domestic violence. The potential link between feminism and arts-based research has been set forth already, partly through introducing Leavy's (2007) suggestion that a feminist challenge to those dichotomies of fact and fiction, and of mind and body, can be usefully expressed through using the arts within research. Consideration has been given in Chapter 3 to what a feminist standpoint methodology entails in terms of challenging the idea of the researcher occupying a privileged position, and demanding of the researcher that they reflexively acknowledge the situated position of their own lives and knowledge as well as that of the subjects of their research, that in this case is mostly centred upon issues of gender. In this chapter, that attention to gender is articulated in more detail where I consider the implications of being a male researcher upon the ethical design of the research and its potential impact upon recruitment.

The notion of truth being partial and situated has been discussed in the previous chapter when considering imagination from a feminist perspective, and Pink's proposal that '[e]thnographic truths are only ever partial and incomplete' (2007a, p.122) acts as a useful guide to both the potential and limitations of an arts-based methodology. Pink and a range of other arts-based researchers will be called upon to explore the theoretical foundations of arts-based research as well as the practicalities involved, including recruitment, ethical procedures and methods of gathering and interpreting data. The previous chapter also presented an overview of the contemporary trends within arts-based methods that are pertinent to this study, including ethical concerns and approaches to evaluation plus a discussion around the consequences of being a male researcher investigating domestic violence. This chapter presents a detailed account of how the research was designed, developed and employed within the pilot phase and main phase of the research.

In clear terms, the method employed involved small groups of women who had experienced domestic violence making visual images that represented their responses to thoughts and feelings about the past, the present and the future in relation to ideas such as home and support. The medium used to create images included collage materials along with basic drawing and painting materials. The aim was for each woman to construct a visual narrative about their transition away from domestic violence. Discussions about those images took place during and after their making, and each woman was given an opportunity to speak about the whole process at the end of their participation. The groups met weekly over several months and a total of eight complete stories were constructed in this way. A pilot phase involved a single group meeting for six weeks, whilst the main phase involved three groups meeting for between ten and twelve weeks. The resulting images and words were responded to and interpreted so as to allow common themes to be identified, with those themes being related to contemporary understandings of domestic violence and used to construct a coherent explanation of what was observed.

4.2   Research design

As both Pink (2009) and Rose (2012) identify, much arts-based research is experimental in nature given the wide variety of potential ways in which visual media can be synthesised together and employed to document or elicit participant responses. The important issue is to be clear about the aims and processes of such experimental methods. The remainder of this chapter therefore sets out in the detail the practical application of an arts-based methodology in the investigation and representation of women's experiences of, and responses to, domestic violence. Throughout this explanation I shall be referring to the pilot phase of the project to help illustrate the evolving design of the research methodology. Table 4.1 summarises the aims and objectives of the research that reflect those concerns set out within the Chapter 2, the exploration of imagination and embodiment within feminist epistemologies, and the consideration of my relationship to the research question and the participants. Essentially, what the design aimed to do was to test out how well visual methods could aid in the telling of women's stories that could usefully inform an understanding of domestic violence. At an earlier stage of the design, the second objective incorporated consideration of women who had English as a second language, and whilst this was of some relevance during the pilot phase it turned out to be an unnecessary objective within the main stage of the research due to the make-up of participants. This point was originally included in response to the art therapy

work I had conducted, when working with women who had experienced domestic violence and in partnership with an organization whose clientele did include a high percentage of women whose first language was not English.

Aim: Develop, implement and evaluate methodologies that employ arts-based and participatory methods for the collection, documentation and representation of women's experiences of domestic violence.
Objectives: 1. Work collaboratively and in partnership with women who have experienced domestic violence to develop and implement a methodology that enables the documentation and representation of their stories in ways that reflect the multi-sensory nature of experience. 2. Investigate and evaluate the potential for arts-based processes to complement word-based documentation and representation of women's experiences of domestic violence. 3. Engage reflexively with the experience of being a male researcher when working with women, including its effect upon the power dynamics within the relationship between researcher and researched. 4. Generate knowledge that can inform the innovation and application of arts-based methodologies and participatory research, including thinking around the ethical issues associated with arts-based data collection and dissemination. 5. Generate knowledge and practices that can inform services who work to support women experiencing domestic violence.

Table 4-1: Research aims and objectives

There were two phases to the research: a pilot phase and main phase. The outline below shows how the research methodology evolved in response to observations made during the pilot phase, and issues encountered in the main phase, starting with decision made about the ethical design of the research.

4.3   Ethical design

A primary concern throughout the design and implementation of the research methodology was the welfare of those women who participated, with three key drivers being the emotional well-being of participants, the protection of personal details and the maintaining of

anonymity. As indicated above, I adopted a situated ethics of care approach (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008), which places the well-being of participants at the centre of research design. It became apparent very soon on that in order to achieve this I would be required to work closely with those organizations that supported women who had experienced domestic violence. Not only would this aid in the ethical concern for participants but would also enable me to work in partnership with organizations driven by feminist principles. Hearn's (1998) comments about ensuring that male researchers who investigate any aspect of violence against women align themselves closely to feminism also necessitated the need to make such links. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, my experience prior to starting this research had included research and art therapy with refugees and asylum seekers, South Asian women, and women who had experienced domestic violence; therefore I already had very useful contacts within organizations that would prove helpful in the recruitment and support of participants.

The situated ethics of care approach was further supported by reference to the ethical codes of the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002), the Visual Sociology Study Group of the British Sociology Association (BSA, 2006) and the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT, 2005). Attention was paid to those particular issues identified within domestic violence research literature concerning the unpredictable nature of participation, the awareness of risk (that participants should have the right to decide for themselves), the vetting of researchers by agencies, how participants' details being anonymous can make follow-up difficult and the issue of disclosure in research (Abrahams *et al*, 2004). When engaging women in discussion of domestic violence it has been noted how it can just as easily lead to feelings of catharsis and trauma as to feelings of empowerment (Williamson, 2000) whereby they might 'realize how angry they were, how used and abused they were or had been' (p.138). Whilst the venting of anger might be validating, it is essential to ensure that adequate post-research support is available, with the researcher being conscious of the power they hold; an awareness that for myself was made essential given the gender difference between participants and myself. The nature of my research topic meant there was a high probability that participants would have strong emotional responses to their own experiences, and those of other participants. I ensured that potential participants were made aware of the possible emotional responses so that they could therefore make informed choices as to whether or not to participate. The services that referred women to the research all provided a range of emotional support as part of their normal service, with each woman having a named

key-worker, meaning that all of the participants had adequate level of support where participation raised concerns and worries that I or the method was not able to contain.

Following the guidance set out in the *Data Protection Act 1998* (HMSO, 1998) and the *Caldecott Principles* (Department of Health, 2013) it was decided that I would not keep any personal details about the participants and that such details would be managed by the referring services. Doing this minimised the risk of personal details being compromised. I only asked that women use their first names when signing consent forms and these were kept by me in a locked filing cabinet within a faculty administrator's office. The images that women made were placed within individual portfolios and these I would take away with me, ensuring that they too were kept in a secure location. During the main phase some women chose to take their images away with them to work upon between their attendances at the groups. Some would also occasionally take their images into counselling, the Freedom Programme[12], or show to friends and family in order to help give weight to what they were trying to articulate. Whilst at first this caused me some concern, worrying that the images might be misinterpreted or taken out of context, I came to see this as an affirmation of the power and value of the methodology. Basic documentary photographs of the images were made by myself at the end of each group, with higher quality photographs of the images being taken by a professional photographer at the end of the data collection process. These photographs were electronically catalogued using pseudonyms. Very few images contained identifying details; a couple contained the names of women's children and one had a photograph of a participant's child. In these instances I digitally edited the photographs to ensure that such elements were removed. Similarly, my field notes and later reflections were careful not to refer to personal details that might compromise participants' anonymity.

All participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the project up until the final meeting of the groups they participated in, and they were not required to say why they did not wish to return. Because of the close relationship between myself and the referring services, where women no longer attended I was able to gain re-assurance that the women were still safe in the sense that they were still in contact with services or the other women in the group. Where women who had participated but not attended the majority of the group meetings, and had not provided commentary and feedback at the end of their participation, I made the

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[12] The Freedom Programme is a rolling 11 to 12 week series of group meetings that 'examines the roles played by attitudes and beliefs on the actions of abusive men and the responses of victims and survivors' http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/ (last accessed 22/11/14). It aims to help women understand what has happened to them and, where appropriate, their children so that they can begin to take steps to make themselves safer.

choice that their images and words should not be included in the final analysis and presentation of data. To make use of their incomplete story would be unethical even though this potentially limited the number of complete stories I was able to make use of.

Appendix 1A and 1B illustrates how these guidelines and considerations manifested themselves in the research through recruitment material and consent forms. Two issues emerged more than once in the pilot phase that had significant implications for the ethical framework used in the main phase. The first was to do with potential inappropriate referrals; the second was concerned with the interface between research and therapy. On two occasions a woman was referred to the pilot group by one of the women's services when it was evident that they were in a state of distress and crises (one had only just arrived in the city, having left a violent partner; the other was awaiting the outcome of a court case happening on the same day as the group). Their arrival presented me with a dilemma: to turn them away could have been dismissive of their needs, yet to consent to their involvement could have been placing them and the group in a vulnerable position. My decision was to let them stay, informing them of the nature of the group, but stating that they did not have to take part and could just use the time as they needed. The presence of a support worker and my own therapeutic skills helped to manage the situation well enough. Further investigation revealed that not everyone working at the referring service was fully informed about the purpose of the research, thinking it to be recreational or therapeutic. As such, one of the changes made to the ethical framework of the main phase of the project was the setting of a firmer boundary of participation and clearer communication with services as to the aim of the research.

The issue of inappropriate referral relates to the issue of research becoming therapy in that whilst research might not explicitly claim to be a therapy, it does have a potential to be transformative and therapeutic, and therefore participants need to be made aware of this possibility. In the recruitment material and during introductory talks to potential participants I made it clear that although the research was not therapy, participation had the potential to be beneficial for individuals. This potential for benefit emerged throughout the groups when I heard women saying how they enjoyed attending and making art. It was also a strong theme within the final feedback where women stated that visual expression was helpful for themselves and for others. At first I felt concerned that the women were using the group purely for therapeutic purposes and that it would become unsafe; but upon reflection with my supervisors I came to appreciate that it was appropriate and to be expected that participants would want to gain something for themselves in taking part. I came to trust them, and to trust the structure and myself in terms of working at an appropriate pace and depth. This is

something that I will reflect on more when evaluating the research in Chapter 9, because despite research informed by feminist principles and PAR being framed as transformative and beneficial for participants (Huss, 2013; O'Neill, 2010; Leavy, 2007; Frohmann, 2005) I often felt ambivalent about this.

Throughout the conducting of the research I was able to make use of my academic supervisors to talk through not just the mechanics of the research or what I was observing within the stories being constructed, but also to talk about those feelings I occasionally had around ambivalence and doubt about the process. I was also able to share with them my feelings of sadness or of wanting to rescue the participants where these feelings arose.

4.4   Recruitment

The first component of the application of the project was the establishment and strengthening of a working relationship with several regional women's organizations, two of which were affiliated with Women's Aid. Whilst recruitment was conducted through organizations that provided refuge services, those organizations also offered outreach services, meaning that very few of the women who eventually participated were living within a refuge. In discussion with staff it seemed that there was no consensus as to when a woman using their service might be 'ready' to take part in the research in terms of the time that had passed since leaving a violent or abusive relationship; a state of ambiguity that mirrors the one found by Hague, Mullender and Aris (2003) in their examination of how women who have experienced domestic become involved in the development and delivery of support services. Whilst I tried to ensure that potential participants and staff were informed as to the aims and limits of the project, it felt appropriate that this decision should be made by the individual women themselves. I paid particular attention to making the distinction between research and therapy clear within the recruitment material. However, as indicated already, within the pilot phase this distinction was not fully understood, and so in the main phase of the research I made even more certain that staff within the referring organizations and the participants themselves understood the nature of the research. As such there was no repeat of the inappropriate referrals that occurred within the pilot phase.

The research was conducted within the East Midlands region of the UK. The pilot phase involved working with two women's services based within a medium-sized city; whilst in the main phase, a third service was involved that was based in a medium sized town which drew its clientele from both urban and rural areas. There was a very clear difference between

the ethnic profiles of the two women's services that were city-based. One appeared to be exclusively White British, whilst the other was mixed but predominantly African and South Asian. This difference reflected the demographics of the areas of the city that the two services were located within. The women who used the town-based service and who participated in this research were all white-British. Such a clear difference between the services might have offered an opportunity to investigate how different ethnic groups experience domestic violence. Whilst such an investigation would be very worthy, it did not form an explicit objective within this project because of the pragmatics of keeping the project focused and manageable. As it turned out, in the main phase of the research, problems to do with lack of support for participants meant that in the end all of the stories were produced by women who were white-British.

The decision as to where to locate the groups was decided by the availability of suitable spaces, proximity to the participating services and, most importantly, security. During the pilot phase a space was found that was very close to one of the services and located in the upstairs room of a library so as to make attendance anonymous and normalized. For the main phase of the project I was able to work within an advice centre run by the service located in the town, and hired rooms in a community centre for the group that was city-based after the library became unavailable.

The presence of a crèche worker and a support worker from the referring services was aimed for within all the groups. A crèche worker had been available during the pilot phase and this had proven invaluable to reducing barriers of participation. In the main phase, one of the city-based women's services was able to offer the use of a crèche worker and I worked hard to find a location that would be happy to have children on-site. However the women's service that was based in the town was not able to offer this service. A support worker was present during the majority of the meetings in both locations, especially towards the beginning so as to help participants feel safe.

The actual recruitment of participants and the facilitation of the meetings within the main phase did though present a number of significant problems that required a further change of plans. These problems revolved around the difficulty in maintaining a consistent level of attendance across the time that the meetings took place. This was particularly the case for the meetings that were city-based and was linked to the problems that the referring services there had in supporting women to the meetings and in providing a regular crèche worker, as had been planned. As the weeks went on it became apparent that the level of attendance of participants was so inconsistent as to make the emergence of coherent visual or

verbal responses unlikely. The consent forms clearly stated that withdrawal could take place at any time without explanation, and I therefore took non-attendance as a message that those women who stopped attending did not want what they had made or said to be included in the research. One woman in the city-based group was though able to attend for the majority of the meetings, and crucially, was able to take part in the final summing-up and evaluation of her participation, thus being able to produce a complete story. As a consequence of the limited participation in the city-based group I was required to run two sets of meetings in the service based in the town. Consistency of attendance was an issue there also but not to the same extent and one woman came to both of those groups. Across all three groups in the main phase a total of twenty women attended at various points and I was able to collect eight completed stories from seven women[13].

The lack of consistent attendance seemed to have a number of causes. The first was that at the time the groups were running from September 2011 to July 2012, cuts to local-government funding, imposed due to national budgetary constraints, meant that the city-based refuge services especially either had to reduce their staffing levels or were seriously distracted by the changes about to take place. This is partly speculation on my part as I did not get a particularly clear response to my questions about this, but it certainly appeared that a feeling of crisis existed that was not present when I had worked with the same services previously. Whatever the reasons, services were not able to provide the support necessary to enable fuller participation. Another possible reason for problems of inconsistent participation is my being a male researcher. I did ask the services to check this out but they felt this was not the reason and it would not explain why participants would be there for some weeks but not for others. I did gain some feedback that suggested a small number of women stopped coming because they found it emotionally difficult; whilst for others they had more pressing priorities, such as moving house or having to attend on-going court appointments. For others, when there was no crèche worker they were unable to attend.

The problems faced by limited participation forced me to question the validity and generalizability of the research, but as has been indicated earlier, within arts-based research, and qualitative research in general, different rules apply to those that would be appropriate for quantitative research. As Barone and Eisner (2012) point out, generalization within arts-based research is not to do with randomisation, as it would be within quantitative research; rather it is to with how well the results fit with other results and its ability to generate

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[13] One of the women, Carol, attended both instances of the group that was based in the town.

questions, arguing that a single example can be considered good-enough if it helps to illuminate the topic being explored. Butler-Kisber (2010) likewise replaces the idea of being able to generalise from results, with being able to evaluate how well the results reflect the particular events or experiences. And whilst the total number of complete stories is low, the time spent creating them was considerable, with the creation of some being spread across twelve meetings, each one lasting two hours. The stories can thus be considered as products of a measured and considered process, with participants able to slowly create their responses in ways that enabled a different level of engagement and dialogue (Rumbold, Fenner & Brophy-Dixon, 2012) than if we had met less frequently.

Table 4.2 provides basic biographical details about the participants whose stories went on to be interpreted and thus contributed to the discussion of themes within this thesis. These details were gained from the conversations that we had throughout their participation rather than any systematic gathering of specific details.

Anne attended most of the meetings that took place in the first group. In her 30s at the time of her participation she was living apart from her current male partner and estranged from her young son. Anne reported that she had experienced periods of ill-health, including multiple sclerosis, which she felt made her further vulnerable to abuse. She was not working at the time of her participation.

Jane attended most of the meetings that took place in the first group. In her 40s, she was living with her young son having left her ex-partner one year previously. Her ex-partner had been verbally abusive and physically violent towards her. Her ex-partners extended family was also coercive and controlling. Jane experienced periods of ill-health due to a serious car accident and cancer. Jane was not working at the time of her participation.

Carol attended most of the sessions that took place in the first and third groups. In her 20s, Carol was currently living with her new male partner and had occasional access to two children from previous relationships. She had been free from a violent relationship for approximately two years. Carol was not working at the time of her participation.

Margaret attended most of the 10 sessions in the second group. Margaret was in her 70s and had lived with a violent partner for 39 years but had left this relationship 15 years previous. She had two adult children and several grandchildren. Margaret held a number of voluntary positions as the time of her participation.

Emma attended the majority of the groups that took place in the third group. In her 40s at the

time of participation, she had lived with a violent husband for 20 years and had left 18 months prior to her participation in the group. She had two teenage sons living with her.
Lisa attended five of the meetings in the third group, including the final evaluation session. In her 40s, Lisa had in the past experienced violence and psychological abuse from a partner and bullying at work. She experienced controlling behaviour from parents, boyfriends, ex-husband, church members and previous employers. She was not living with violence or abuse at the time of her participation and she did not report having any children. Lisa indicated that she was employed within an educational establishment.
Lorraine attended half of the session that took place in the third group. In her 40s, she had been living with domestic violence for 20 years and was still living within that relationship. She indicated that both her husband and her son had been verbally and physically abusive towards her. Lorraine indicated that she was employed within a health-care establishment.

Table 4-2: Basic biographical details of research participants

4.5 Data collection

The collection of data, which consisted of both words and images, was developed and refined within the pilot phase of the project, and here I outline how that process evolved across the two elements. The pilot group involved participants meeting weekly over six weeks, whilst the three groups in the main phase met each week over a twelve week period. The meetings lasted approximately two hours, which gave time for the creation of images and discussion about them, as well as the usual social interactions that might accompany people meeting together with a shared goal: drinking tea, eating biscuits, the sharing of news. All of which added to the sense of support women reported gaining from their participation.

A mixture of collage and easy to use drawing and painting materials were offered to participants to aid in the construction of images (figure 4.3). Collage is a useful medium because of its ease of use and immediacy that can help to over-come many peoples' fears of not being able to draw or paint (Rose, 2012). Collage enables people to engage with making visual images in a tactile and layered way. Arts-based researcher Lynn Butler-Kisber writes that 'collage evokes embodied responses, and uses the juxtaposition of fragments and the presence of ambiguity to engage the viewer in multiple avenues of interpretation' (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p.103). In this way collage fits extremely well with the underlying epistemology employed within this research where a perception of truth as being fragmented, partial and ambiguous has been adopted. Additionally collage provides a chance for a varied

selection of images that enable representations of things remembered (Mannay, 2010, p.99), as well as things imagined. Collage also allows for the tactile qualities of materials to be exploited in a way that enables a multisensory approach to the representations of memory, imagination, thought and feeling; texture, weight and depth can be used alongside line, shape and colour. Butler-Kisber (2010) points out that there are issues to do with copyright laws when using found images but states that fair use rules apply when employing collage within educational contexts.
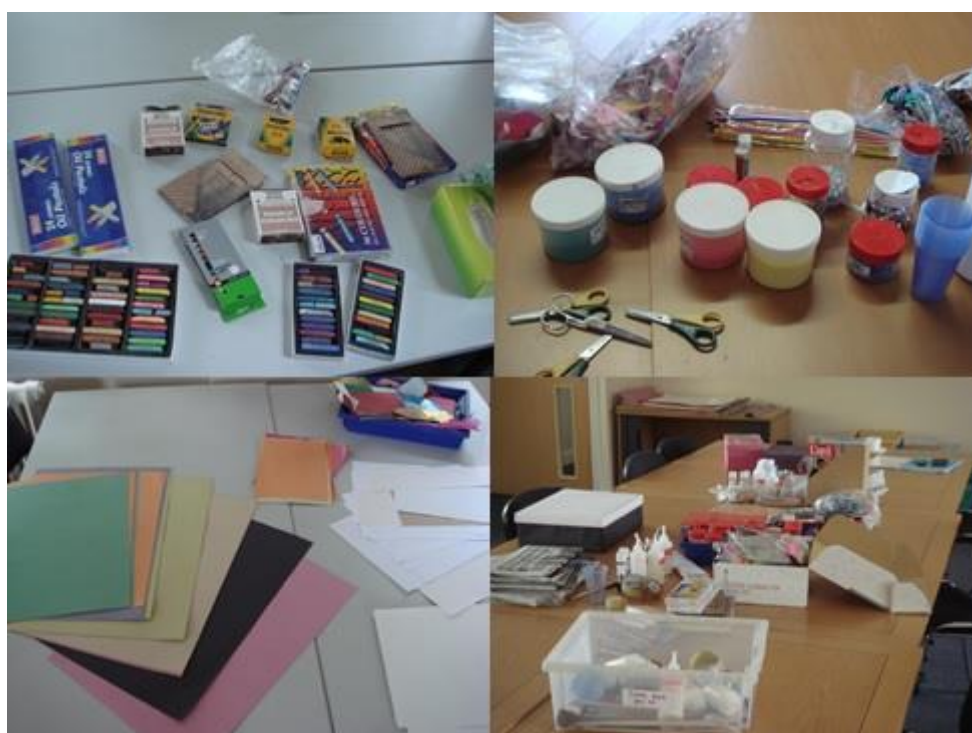
Figure 4.1: Collage and art materials used within sessions

(Source: Jamie Bird)

Within the pilot phase a group of actors employing Playback Theatre were involved during one of the meetings. Playback Theatre involves a small group of actors listening to stories told by members of the audience and then, employing improvisational methods, playing those stories back. The aim is to enable the storyteller to witness their narrative in an embodied and dramatic way that provides an opportunity to view that story differently, or to gain new understanding (Rowe, 2007). It has much in common with the principles of Forum Theatre and, as shown in the Chapter 2, is documented as being useful within the field of domestic violence awareness training (Baird & Salmon, 2012; Mitchell & Freitag, 2011). The use of Playback Theatre within the pilot phase did prove to be very useful in enabling an alternative

way of expressing responses to questions about domestic violence. Unfortunately, due to a lack of physical space it was not possible to make use of Playback Theatre within the main phase of the research.

Within the pilot phase, after an introductory session that involved participants making simple images to explore the possibilities of the materials provided and to give participants a way of introducing themselves to each other, each session involved a different suggested focus. The focus moved from thinking about the past, the present and the future in terms of experiences of, and responses to, domestic violence. Adopting such a structured approach was taken in response to the limited time frame and the potential vulnerability of the participants. Experience as an Art Therapist had shown me that in such circumstances a less structured approach would generate an excessive amount of anxiety. Discussions with my academic supervisors helped to shape the themes and a growing appreciation of the place of imagination within research reassured me that it was valid to include the future as one of the themes. Time was allotted at the end of each meeting for participants to look at what had been produced and to talk about those things if they felt able to. At first this verbal element was conducted in quite a formal way by asking each person in turn if they would like to say something. However, by making the task more informal, with participants looking at the work collectively, partaking of refreshments and contributing spontaneously, it became more productive. At points, when participants were engaged in making images, they would talk to me if I was sitting nearby so that the interaction became more private. Whilst participants spoke about their images I would make written notes and expand upon these after the sessions.

The final session of the pilot phase group involved women who attended providing responses to questions I asked about the value of the research questions and methods of data collection. Feedback provided by the participants of the pilot phase revealed that the nature of the arts-based activities was felt to be appropriate; this included the choice of medium and the pace at which the activities progressed. The drama-based session was felt to be very challenging so its appearance towards the end of the group was felt to be right. Using the structure of past, present and future was commented upon, with it being felt that the present was the easiest to think about. Thinking about the future and in particular the issues of taking control and making decisions was felt to be the hardest of the three, even though it was felt to be an important realisation. A suggestion was made that the present should be the focus to begin with before then moving onto the past and then the future. When asked what could be

explored in greater depth during the next phase of the project the women suggested that family, decision making and the nature of support be included.

In response to the pilot phase feedback some changes were made to the themes that would be suggested for participants to think about when making images. Table 4.3 shows an outline of the initial aim of each of the meetings in the main phase, repeated for each of the three groups. As can be seen, after the introduction session the focus began by thinking about responses to support within the present, before moving onto thoughts about support in the future and then onto a focus upon home and family. The theme of home was added because analysis of the pilot phase stories showed that this was an important element for the participants in thinking about their present and future lives. Whilst the questions outlined in table 4.3 proved useful as a starting point, I allowed for the potential of participants to find their own way through thinking about domestic violence, its effects upon them or their imaginings of what their futures might look like. In total 60 images were made by those women whose stories went on to form the basis for the analysis of stories and the formation of this thesis.

Week	Focus
1	Introductions
2	Support as experienced in the present
3	Support as desired in the future
4	Home
5	Family
6-11	Working on images made in previous weeks
12	Review of images and evaluation of process

Table 4-3: Outline of weekly sessions

In a similar way to the pilot phase I would write down my observations and tried to record something of the conversations that women had about domestic violence and how they spoke about their images. In the final session some participants were happy to have their feedback and evaluation recorded on a digital recorder that I later transcribed. Other participants did not want their responses to be recorded so either wrote their responses or spoke them whilst I made notes. In total 23,000 words were digitally recorded and transcribed, with a similar amount appearing within my hand-written notes.

Whilst the pilot phase did prove useful in testing out and refining the use of an arts-based methodology and highlighted ethical issues that required addressing, the words and images that eventually contributed to data analysis and the construction of an explanation came from the main phase of the research, although when identifying themes that emerged within the main phase it was clear that similar themes had emerged in the pilot phase. There were however two themes that emerged in the pilot phase that whilst not re-appearing in the main phase, were of interest. The first was the role of faith for several of the women in their response to domestic violence; the second was the desire for economic independence as part of their imagined futures. The issue of faith may have appeared in the pilot phase and not the main phase because of the cultural background of the respective participants. The issue of economic independence became one of the triggers for my collaboration with an Occupational Therapist to develop a project that aimed to help women who had experienced domestic violence to gain employment skills and training (Bird & Bullen, 2013).

Following the completion of all three groups the images were photographed again by a professional photographer and the original images returned to participants. Where participants did not wish to have their images returned, or referring services were not able to return them, these have been retained to be confidentially and sensitively disposed of following the final submission of this thesis.

4.6   Responding to and interpreting images and words

The main element that still required working through following the pilot phase was to finalise the way in which I responded to and interpreted the images and words created by participants. As Pink (2009) writes in noting the limited documentation of how ethnography analyses data, the 'analysis of experiential, imaginative, sensorial and emotional dimensions of ethnography is itself often an intuitive, messy and sometimes serendipitous task' (p.119). Because of this messiness no two research processes are the same, with the arts-based researcher developing

a process that is sensitive and responsive to the subject, location and participants of research. Whilst my research is not ethnographic in the sense that I did not live in close proximity with participants over a sustained period of time, it shares some of its principles in that I was immersed to some extent within the culture of the services that supported the research, and what Pink says about imaginative and sensual forms of ethnographic research applies equally to arts-based research. The argument for imaginative and embodied responses to visual images also fits with the epistemological foundations of this thesis and research.

One of the ways in which Pink suggests that a researcher might approach visual or sensory data is for the researcher to make use of their own imagination and embodied experiences in a way that enables a corporeal engagement with data. In an earlier text, Pink (2007a) suggests that the aim is not to translate images into words but to explore the relationship between words and images and to hold in mind that images will have different meanings depending upon the context and the person constructing those meanings. Stanczak (2007) similarly claims that the meaning within visual images resides in the responses participants or researchers have to them rather than within the inherent properties of the images. Huss (2013) meanwhile proposes that the analysis of visual images in research can be approached from a phenomenological perspective, in terms of acknowledging the interpretations that individual participants make about the images they have made. They can also be approached from a social theory perspective, asking how the images might expose discourses of social knowledge and power. In this way, Huss argues, the 'analysis conceives of the art as a discourse that is both subjective and culturally embedded' (p.23). Huss also proposes that where images are made within groups then the interpretations made by the group form part of the analysis of images and reveal something of the social context within which the images were made. These different perspectives 'enable a multiple and tentative analytical prism that defines the role of the image within research' (p.69). Paying attention to the social component of images and their meanings, both in terms of collective creations within small groups and their location within wider social process and forces, locates the interpretation of them within the notion of art as primarily a social act as opposed to a private act (Jones, 2006; Chaplin, 1994).

There are other ways of approaching and analysing images: discourse analysis, psychoanalysis or semiotics for example (Rose, 2012). Such methods of analysis are though better suited to the consideration of found images rather than images made by research participants. In this research, with its strong sense of collaboration and participation, I deemed it inappropriate to adopt such analytical methods and to instead develop a way of

categorising and making sense of both the images and the words that was careful to honour the participants stories above all else, even whilst overlaying theoretical understandings of those stories.

The approach taken by myself to responding to the images and words made by participants reflects many of the above points. The method did evolve as the process unfolded, as is very often the way within visual methods (Pink, 2009), and did take account of personal, interpersonal and social perspectives, whilst making use of imagination and embodied responses. It will be observed that I have steered clear of using the term 'analysis' and instead chosen to adopt the terms 'interpretation'. This, I argue, better reflects the underlying epistemologies, which emphasise the limitations of imposing a singular reading upon data, whilst foregrounding the role of the subjectivity of the researcher within the process of encountering that data.

The final approach took the following form:

- Written notes were made of my initial observations of how women had used materials and spoken about their images, including conversations that took place between women in the groups. This included conversations that sometimes went beyond the subject of the images being made. These notes were made within the sessions themselves and so were rather brief and sketchy as I wanted to be present in the group rather than get too caught up in the act of note-taking. Basic photographs of images were made at the end of each session in order to aid the next step in the analysis of data.

- A continuation of these observations were made after the group, where I was able to write in more detail what I had seen and heard, to wonder how themes might be resonating from week to week, to look for connections to domestic violence literature and to think reflexively about my emotional responses to what I was witnessing. It was at this point in the process that I began to consider how the images and words might be framed in phenomenological and cultural terms as suggested by Huss (2013), whilst being attentive to the need to not assume that my interpretation was the final and definitive interpretation, but rather a reflection of my interaction with the images (Stanczak, 2007).

- Following the conducting of all three groups, the recording of final commentary and evaluations, and the photographing of images by a professional photographer, I

collated each participant's images and discussions together to create eight separate sets of images and words; these were the completed stories. I was then able to engage in another round of responses to images, where I allowed myself to emotionally and intellectually respond to the images, as well as to look for themes within each set of words and images, as well as themes that linked individual participant's stories together. By bringing the images and words of each individual participant, together with my original observations, it felt possible to engage in what felt close to Pink's (2009) notion of embodied and corporeal responses to data. In practice this meant that I spent a considerable amount of time looking at the photographic reproductions of images and re-reading the transcripts and my notes, attempting to immerse myself in the tone and mood of what was being represented. Again, whilst I allowed myself to engage with the participants' stories, I was conscious of how my responses were framed by my own situated imagination (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002). The way I approached the images and the words came close to the way in which Rose (2012) describes how, within photo-elicitation research, that whilst very often words and images are coded as a single set of data, there are examples (Keats, 2009 cited in Rose, 2012) where they are considered separately; with the relationship between them being viewed as an important and equal component to be explored alongside the separate elements.

- In the final writing-up phase I again allowed myself to respond to the images in an emotional and embodied way, as well as to link the emergent themes to wider issues identified within domestic violence literature so as to think through further how the participants' stories resonated and illuminated with the literature as well as adding additional and original insights. Those original insights involved drawing upon theories taken from various sociological texts that will become apparent in the discussion chapters that follow. Approaching the writing-up phase as a component of interpretation fits with a concept of writing being a legitimate form of making sense of qualitative data (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005).

From this process of interpretation and sense-making, a final explanation is attempted, that takes account of the limitations of any explanation of people's subjective responses to their experiences, and the limitations of a single researcher working with representations of those experiences.

4.7　Summary

This chapter and the preceding one have outlined the core features of arts-based research suggesting that it enables a representation of experience that is inclusive of a number of perspectives: the personal; the interpersonal; the social; the cognitive; the embodied; and the affective. These perspectives are further enhanced when the visual is joined by the spoken and written word. The ocular metaphors of prisms, lenses and stereoscopic vision have been variously employed to help give shape to that idea. I have been careful not to suggest that one form of knowing and presentation is intrinsically superior to any other, rather that there is a process of complementarity that can take place when shifting between perspectives. There is of course a question of evaluating the quality of that relationship and this is reflected in the questions that I set out towards the end of Chapter 2.

Within Chapter 3, when thinking through the nature of arts-based methods, I have shown how it has the potential to be synthesised with feminist standpoint theory and PAR, and used to give shape to women's experience of domestic violence in a way that attempts to value different ways of knowing and privileges research participants' experiences, voices and imagined futures. In order to realise that potential, and to acknowledge the intimacy and vulnerability inherent within both arts-based research and domestic violence research, I have suggested that there has to be very careful management of the how participants engage with the process and how I, as a male researcher, think about my position within that process. A situated ethics of care approach (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008) was put forward as a way of managing the tensions that arise within those processes. This chapter has articulated what that approach looked like in practice.

The need to re-frame what validity means within the context of arts-based research has been considered with a particular emphasis upon the issue of limited participant numbers when compared to other methods of data collection. The response has been to draw attention to how the results of arts-based research reveal more about particular instances and examples than they do about generalised truths, with the way in which novels can be evocative of truths that are no less valid for their limited sample size, used as a useful metaphor in thinking about arts-based research's place within the generation of knowledge and truth. In fact throughout this chapter, and the preceding chapter, I have drawn attention to how the notion of truth being situated, partial and messy forms an essential element of not only arts-based research but also of feminist epistemologies. How well the research conducted here can be considered

as being of value and worth will be based upon its ability to resonate with existing literature and illuminate the particular experiences and imaginations of the women involved.

The following chapters present the results of participants' engagement with the research process and my attempt to provide a response to them that is attentive to individual stories and collective meanings.

5 : Escape and Harmony

5.1 Introduction

During the writing-up of this thesis I struggled a great deal with how to represent the images and words of individual participants in a way that preserved their separateness and uniqueness, whilst at the same time, attempting to arrive at a description and conceptual model that transcended individual stories. This presented a dilemma of the sort explored when thinking through the challenges of narrative-based and arts-based research in earlier chapters, where the authenticity of the individual story needs to be balanced with a need to contextualise that story and provide a systematic analysis of collections of stories (Radley, 2009). Originally I had hoped to present individual stories one-by-one. This approach of allowing the images and initial responses to emerge first, before applying more formal interpretations, would have afforded participants' responses to their images a high status (Stanczak, 2007), and follows Huss's (2013) method of allowing a phenomenological response to the images to emerge first, before applying more abstract theory to the understanding of images in research. I would also suggest that giving space for the images and individual stories to take centre stage tests out the notion that visual images have an intrinsic value in and of themselves, and that doing so may engage the imagination of the reader. However, so much data was collected in the form of images, field-notes, interview transcripts and my embodied responses, that presenting each individual story would have added 120 pages, 80 figures and 32,000 words! In the form of a chapter, chapters, or appendix, this was obviously untenable, although the formatting of the data and the construction of those un-used chapters contributed to my understanding of the data. The creation of those chapters formed part of my encounter and response to the participant's words and images, so that the embodied responses I had to the participants' images and words were the product of a two-stage process. They were first written when all of the groups had been completed and the spoken evaluations had been transcribed and the images photographed. They were then re-visited in that initial writing-up. This evolving approach to my response to the participants' stories reflects Pink's (2009) comments about the uniqueness of visual methodology in terms of its adaptability to individual contexts. It also reflects the idea that writing itself becomes a method of inquiry in which the researcher can 'learn about themselves and their research topic' (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p.959).

The following chapters discuss those key themes that collectively appeared within individual stories and which offer unique insights into the effects of domestic violence upon those who experience it. Given the quantity of image-based and word-based data produced during the research, a process of editing and selection has by necessity been required, but the themes discussed in the following chapters are those that appeared consistently throughout and that appeared to be referenced by most participants. Images, quotations from transcripts and my own notes are used to illustrate and demonstrate the themes discussed. Some of the images are referenced more than once, which demonstrates the ability of images to contain layered meanings, and some of the sub-themes cross over the broader categories that I have created. The distinction between mental, physical and social acts and strategies is not clear cut and reflects the understanding of embodiment introduced within Chapter 3. Similarly, the distinction between points in time is occasionally opaque.

The focus of this first discussion chapter, that I have given the title *Escape & Harmony,* is upon how participants recounted their experiences of becoming aware of domestic violence, escaping and moving away from it, and their attempts to create a more harmonious life and home for themselves and their families, now and in the future. Some of this work was mental work, but most of this chapter pays attention to the physicality of the participants' strategies to escape and achieve harmony. The second discussion chapter, titled *Relationships and Social Support*, explores how participants made use of the past and the future to think about their responses to living after domestic violence, and how their idea of a safe and harmonious family and home is based upon personal and social scripts. The focus of that chapter will be more upon the social component of the strategies that participants employed in how they made sense of their experiences and their attempts to make changes, and will also consider how agencies and services enabled and hindered their attempts to create new lives for themselves. In the third discussion chapter, titled *Agency and Resistance,* attention is given to how the women explored more internal processes to do with acceptance, decision making and determination during their transition away from domestic violence. Chapter 8 draws together the themes discussed in order to develop a coherent explanation and framework of what participants were communicating about their experiences of domestic violence; and explanation that I label *transitional stories of domestic violence*.

This first discussion chapter introduces three themes: firstly, the way in which women represented how they became aware of the effect of domestic violence upon their lives and started to move away from it; secondly, how the domestic environment, often in the shape of a new home, could be managed in a way that expressed a growing sense of control and

agency; and thirdly, the natural environment as a literal and metaphorical form of escape and harmony. The chapter closes by proposing that strategies of survival and resistance that begin whilst living with domestic violence continue to inform women's imagined futures and that those strategies are often embodied through everyday domestic acts and engagement with the built and natural environment.

Names used throughout this and later chapters are pseudonyms, and the transcripts of conversations are as close to verbatim as possible. Where images are shown, details about the name of the maker, along with the group and week in which it was made, are provided.

5.2   From darkness to light

Whilst participants focused mostly upon their present circumstances, or imagined their futures, there was some attention to how they perceived themselves becoming aware that they were living with a violent and abusive partner, and to how they made the first stage of transition away from that relationship and environment. Two images show this sense of awareness particularly well. Figure 5.1 shows Emma's representation of how she remembered living with her violent husband.

This is an image that represents a sense of emerging from darkness into light, but also of being caught between darkness and light. Emma commented that the family home had felt dark and enclosed. Lyrics from Elton John songs, quoted at the very start of this thesis, are used to illustrate her memories, and the suggestion was made that she listened to those songs as one way of managing her feelings whilst living with domestic violence and beyond. The use of the word 'sacrilegious' within those lyrics is significant because Emma stated that she felt that the violence and abuse was damaging to her self-respect and thus a sacrilegious act against who she was as a person. She also talked about the sacrifice (another word that appears within the lyrics) that she had made: staying in the hope of something better happening. Within literature this is suggested as a common reason given for staying (Campbell *et al,* 1998; Kirkwood 1993; Marecek, 1993) and here we can see that played out on the paper with the huddled figure being half-way between the darkness of staying and the light of leaving or the hope of there being a non-violent relationship. This sense of being half-way between two positions resonates with the image and metaphor of being at a cross-roads and is a one that will be encountered further on when considering how participants made sense of the past, the present and the future.

Figure 5.1: Emma, group 3, week 5

This sense of movement from darkness into light and an awareness of the reality of domestic violence can be seen in an image produced by Lorraine (figure 5.2), in which she explored the release of emotions that she had held back for a long time. Although still living with a partner who was violent the sense was that she was allowing that knowledge to be known to herself, but also to other people that included other women in the group and myself. In speaking about this image Lorraine made reference to finding pathways out of violence and of the chains that held her there. Like Emma's image (figure 5.1) the focus here is upon the growing awareness of the physical emotions (crying and crouching) and mental feelings (sadness) provoked by the reality of domestic violence, and the beginnings of finding a way to change that reality. Whilst not directly related to physical acts of escape, these first two

images symbolise the beginnings of that change, and are thus shown here to provide some chronological structure to the forthcoming discussion.
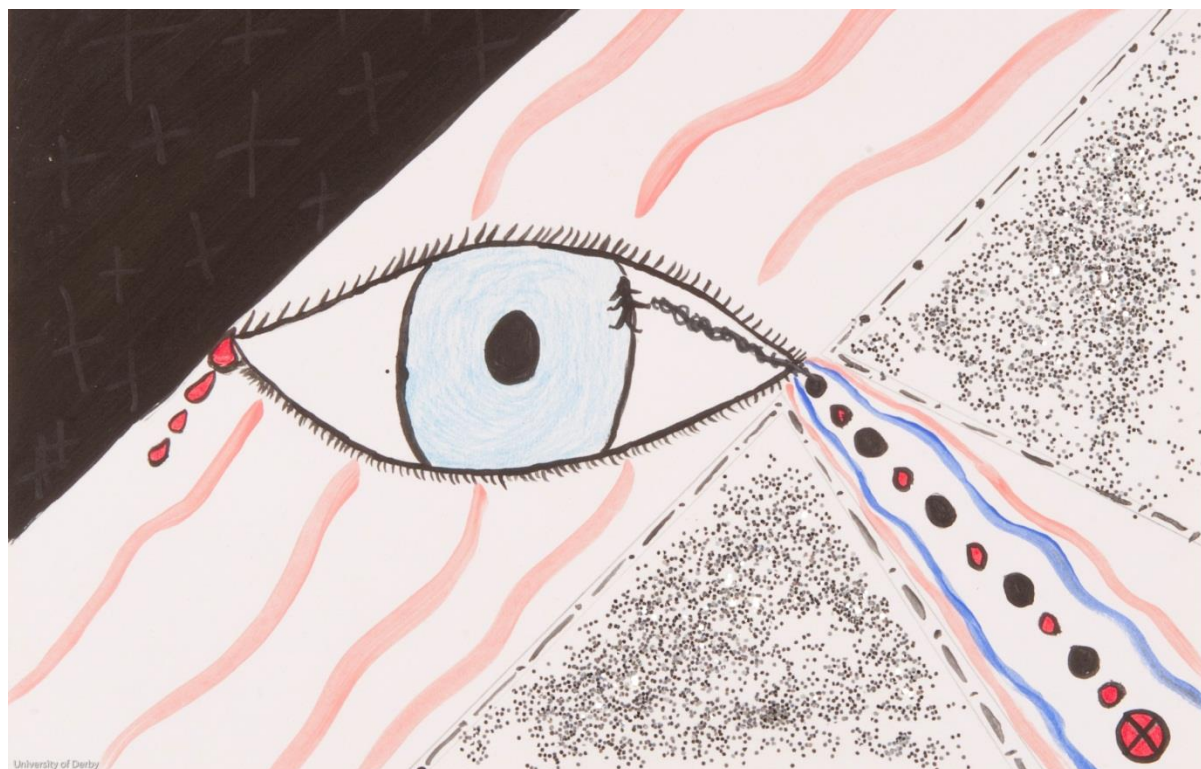
Figure 5.2: Lorraine, group 3, week 6

5.3 Managing spaces

Whilst the first theme shows how women started to appreciate the reality of domestic violence, the second theme explores how the move away from domestic violence very often involves physical movement. Transition away from a controlling and violent partner required most of the participants to physically move home. This had practical implications in terms of location, financial considerations and the usual issues that confront anyone moving home, further compounded by limited resources and the requirement to act quickly. For the participants of this research the idea of house and home had an added significance and the physicality of home was especially important. As will be shown, home for some of the participants became a way of asserting their independence, resistance to control, and, along with engagement with the natural environment, became a way of escaping discord and seeking harmony. Starting with the very basics of how to assemble and decorate a home, there are several examples of participants deliberately and self-consciously doing this as a form of self-assertion. Several images created by Jane show this very well.

Figure 5.3: Jane, group 1, week 2

The first image (figure 5.3) shows how Jane used management of her garden as a way of re-enforcing the separation and difference between herself and her ex-partner's family. She stated that:

> *"Green is like an important colour . the grass and everything . erm, the grass seed that I've planted has grown . me and (son's name), and we've planted bulb's and things where we are."*

Further stating that:

> *"[Cos you've mentioned grass a lot haven't you in, in the pictures? Or shown us grass a lot.] Where I lived next door I did the same thing; it was all flowers and borders and I painted . planted grass seed to make it less hard work for me . erm . but this is making this house better, planting grass seed . . . I can't quite remember doing this one [Mm] . . but it . it's still . I am me putting down all the horribleness [Mm] that (ex-partner's name) mums given me that I'm just trying to get rid of these tomatoes and everything. The dirt and the house . . well the stairs . . . with strawberry plants because . . everything's got to be (ex-*

> *partner's nationality) . [Mm] and . but it's everything I did any way, like*
> *growing tomatoes and strawberries . and things."*

This notion of managing one's home environment as a form of self-determination was repeated by Jane later on when making figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Jane, group 1, week 4

Jane said the following about this second image:

> *"The stairs again. I think this is when it really starts coming out how I feel*
> *[Mm] . The stones . . . there all . . (indistinct) . . . is it bricks and stones, sticks*
> *and stones can [oh yeah] yeah it was that [Mm] . . but calling never hurt me.*
> *But it did! Twenty years of this family, the (ex-partner's nationality), the old*

(ex-partner's nationality) getting me down and finally it just pfff . [Mm] . I've gotta do something."

Comments that were re-enforced when she stated:

"So it's me getting the confidence . . to just say goodbye to her and her standards and how she wants to live [Mm]. (Ex-partner's name) unfortunately is just not strong enough to do it."

A final example of Jane showing this manipulation of the home is figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Jane, group 1, weeks 8-10

The three-dimensional image in Figure 5.5 shows, amongst other things, the way Jane perceived her ex-partners family controlling behaviour as being embodied in their style of kitchen that was primarily of brick and stone, and that she herself chose to reject when decorating her own kitchen. This even extended to the type of food cooked (the ginger bread men in image 5.4 for example), wherein Jane rejected the style of cooking that had been imposed upon her by her ex-partner and his family.

A further example of the importance of the physicality of the home is seen in one part of another three-dimensional image (figure 5.6), this time made by Margaret.

Figure 5.6: Margaret, group 2, weeks 6-9

Of this image Margaret stated:

"The other end I've got . erm . . prettiness . . erm, a table set out with roses. Just pictures of . . erm, inside of cupboards of ornaments . and just looks nice . [Yeah] I've stuck a bottle of wine on that because I like wine, and some slippers and a bag . it's a sofa with cushions, just make it cosy . . I've stuck a picture of a musical instrument on the wall . . . . that is some . . flowers in (indistinct) [oh yeah] . and I've got that [Mm] . and that's a picture of more flowers, and a little chair with a book on it there . . and on the bottom I've stuck some slippers and . . I've just stuck a leaflet that says "A Legacy of Love" . but I've covered it in . some net . so it's not . a hundred percent there, it's still covered [Yeah]."

Margaret was comparing this sense of domestic comfort with the cold and stony (her terms) nature of her marriage that had ended some years previously. Like Jane then, Margaret was consciously managing her domestic environment as a form of self-determination and as a way of putting distance between herself and her past. The physical quality of materials (cold, warm, hard, soft etc.) came to take on symbolic meaning for these women, and for other

participants so that we start to see how thoughts, feelings and physical space are interconnected.

As well as showing the management of the home in the present, there were examples of women thinking about how they would want their home to be in the future. Figure 5.7 shows an example of this where Anne represented her idea of a home she would want in the future.

Figure 5.7: Anne, group 1, week 4

Anne's response to this image was:

> ". . the picture of me home is, is what I want for the future. I just want to be safe and secure and I've never had that in my, my life [Yeah]. It's like, like mo, mo, mo, mo, move. Even now I'm struggling with having to move again and, and the thought of moving again and the thought of new people, new surroundings and I'm gona close down again and become a recluse and . but, but . then I've just got to work through it again [Yeah] yes? So I want to stop having to keep moving about, I want to be safe, I want to be comfortable, I

> *want to feel . a part of a family and [Mm] . . I want to be at home [Yes]. I want*
> *a home [Yes]. I've never had a home."*

The important issue here is how, for Anne, the imagined future home is one that is not only safe and secure but one that can be something she has never had before. Elsewhere Anne spoke about her childhood home being one of fear, but also spoke about her ideal home being similar in style to her childhood home, which in this instance was a bungalow. What also seems significant in this image is how the emptiness of the drawn house is contrasted with the opulence contained within the collaged elements. There is logic to this given that Anne is thinking about the future and the potential for a home to come. The greenness of the grass and the potted tree linked to Anne's use of natural imagery in other images – that for her seemed to represent escape from the confinement encountered during her childhood and through her experience of living with multiple sclerosis in adulthood. There is also a sense of the fantastic in the opulence shown here, when placed into the context of Anne's limited material resources.

Relating these observations about the manipulation of the domestic space in the present and the imagined future home to literature, a number of pertinent connections appear. The importance of home and decoration to women who have experienced domestic violence has been identified by Abrahams (2010) in her interviews with women. In particular Abrahams writes that '[r]eplacing donated goods with items of their own choosing and redecorating their new homes enabled women to develop their sense of autonomy and build their confidence in making and taking decisions' (p.44). Abrahams' interviewees reported that decisions made about their new home were affirming, and this was evident within my own research. However, as will emerge later, decision making for participants was occasionally experienced as anxiety provoking and created a sense of ambivalence, and we see something of this in Emma's (figure 5.1) image of herself being part-way between darkness and light. The process that Abrahams identified about choice is very evident in the images shown above, with the addition of specific attention to the symbolic significance of the choice of materials, colours and other sensual qualities. The importance of the senses to every-day domestic life is explored by Pink (2009), including an example of how the cleanliness of laundry is subjectively evaluated through sight and smell. In the images shown, the very simple and basic sensual qualities of decoration and of food contribute to the women's sense of autonomy: it is not just a new kitchen, it is a kitchen that feels warm and

welcoming because its tactile qualities physically evoke those emotions, as well as having associations that run counter to the environment that is being rejected, and by association the relationship that is being rejected. Whilst not referenced by any of the participants there is also the possibility that the desire for comfort was also a desire for cleanliness in the sense of a clean break with the past and a new start, embodied within the material properties of home decoration and food preparation.

This intermingling of the sensual, the affective, the management of a physical environment and the deliberate strategies of self-determination, allows for the consideration of a key explanatory proposition that I wish to make in this thesis. It is an explanation that has its roots within the ideas introduced in Chapter 3 where I explored how imagination, story and embodiment were related to one another and pertinent to feminist and arts-based research. In that chapter I set forth the proposition that the link between thought and feeling, imagination and reason was contained within the concept of embodiment, using various responses to the philosophy of Spinoza as a way supporting that suggestion. Here I want to introduce the work of neurologist Antonia Damasio (2004; 2000), and his development of the idea of the *auto-biographical self*, as further support for that proposition and for its relevance to the themes identified in my research. Damasio describes the autobiographical self in the following way:

> The autobiographical self is based on autobiographical memory which is constituted by implicit memories of multiple instances of individual experience of the past and of the anticipated future. The invariant aspects of an individual's biography form the basis for autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory grows continuously with life experience but can be partly remodelled to reflect new experiences. Sets of memories which describe identity and person can be reactivated as a neural pattern and made explicit as images whenever needed.
>
> (2000, p.174)

The important points to take away from this definition that are most relevant to my thesis, are the plasticity of autobiographical memory and the neurological basis for the mental images that make up the autobiographical memory. An absolutely essential element of the way in which Damasio understands neurology is in the way that he places mental activity upon the foundations of the physicality of the brain *and* the body. In fact Damasio, in his own

reflections upon Spinoza's concept of the mind-body relationship, believes that without body there is no brain, and therefore no mind and no consciousness, and provides various examples from neuropathology to prove this point. Damasio writes that the current understanding of neurology allows for the suggestion '[t]hat the body (the body-proper) and the brain form an integrated organism and interact fully and mutually via chemical and neural pathways' (2004, p.194), explaining further that 'the images we experience are brain constructions *prompted* by an object, rather than mirror reflections of the object' (p.201, original emphasis). Mental images are then, in this explanation, constructions: constructions that are framed by pre-existing responses the individual has had, including the affective, but also framed by socially accepted responses and emotions that the individual has been exposed to. Social responses such as shame, guilt and sympathy are included here. It is at this point that a link between the rather esoteric topic of neurology and the more familiar concepts of phenomenology and of social-constructionism can be identified, providing as it does another way of considering the place of the body within a sociological understanding of experience.

Returning to the examples provided so far, the contention would be that how women were responding to the idea of home was not only a physiological response, but also one shaped by social expectations of what home should be. This is, I think, evident in the way that participants used advertising images of gardens and interior spaces to represent their own homes, with Anne in particular making use of particularly opulent images (figure 5.7). There is of course an inevitability about this, given that I had provided participants with collage material that include magazines that are aimed at affluent and aspirational audiences; however participants accepted those representations without criticism and therefore it can be supposed that there was a similarity between the women's own idea of a comfortable and safe home with that represented by the more publically available representations of that idea. There may also be an argument for stating that there is a gendered component to the ideas expressed about home: woman as home-maker for example, with this represented here as choice of decoration, garden design and food preparation. Malos and Hague (1997, cited in Abrahams, 2010) suggest that home has different meanings for men and women, with women seeing home more as a place of work than a place of leisure. There is though some subversion of this within the participant's representations, in the way in which decisions made about the home were for personal satisfaction rather than for the benefit of others. As Paula Wilcox writes: 'Home (linked to 'family') is a potent site in which gender-differentiated meanings, relationships and practices are produced, reinforced and *potentially can be changed*' (2006, p.85, emphasis added).

Related to this consideration of social expectations, I want to now introduce another set of ideas that I believe can contribute to understanding how participants responded to thinking about the effects of domestic violence upon their autobiography, and by implication to other women in similar circumstances. This additional set of ideas comes from sociologists Cohen and Taylor's (1992) work upon the way in which people engage in attempts to resist and escape from the limitations imposed by every-day social life. Cohen and Taylor's central thesis is that due to the high value placed upon individual identity, within modern and post-modern societies, much of personal and public life is geared towards the construction of attitudes and behaviour that provide a sense of novelty, difference and a refusal to conform to repetition. Their original focus was upon how life-term prisoners cope with the possibility of never being released and resist institutionalisation, but they soon came to realise that the strategies employed by prisoners were repeated beyond the prison wall and evident within all individuals, groups and social institutions. They go so far as to suggest that any utopian philosophy or political movement can be considered as an attempt to escape from everyday routine. Whilst not all of Cohen and Taylor's ideas can be applied to what participants were showing and saying as part of this research, the idea of individuals developing strategies of resistance and escape does apply. This includes specific examples they give of leisure activities, hobbies and holidays being forms of escape, and I will discuss the relevance of that idea in the second half of this chapter. It also includes the notion of scripts, and it is worth considering in detail what is meant by that term.

Cohen and Taylor claim that '[o]ur lives are not lived out by simply playing sets of roles; these roles are located within a series of minor and major dramas' (p. 70). Master scripts are described as commonly available ways of thinking about and responding to a situation, whilst the individual might construct scripts which attempt to counter those master scripts so that 'we may consciously construct scripts against such master scripts, actively announcing our disenchantment with the customary plots and characters' (p.74). Cohen and Taylor discuss in detail how individuals become aware of repetitive scripts or have a sense of déjà vu when the same patterns appear to be repeated. They also discuss how identity work is contributed to by individuals consciously manipulating and subverting scripts; although they seem to arrive at the rather pessimistic position there is in contemporary society no such thing as an original script. The sources of these scripts are, according to Cohen and Taylor, primarily taken from popular culture: advertising; newspapers; television; radio; films.

What is useful about the concepts of escape and scripts, in relationship to my discussion of participant's images and words, is that the women's actions and thought

processes can be viewed as ways of them actively employing one set of scripts in ways that countered other scripts they were trying to move away from. So for example, Jane employed actions that allowed her to counter a script of being the subservient daughter-in-law by generating a script that was about being a good home-maker. She had already escaped physical violence, this was now her way of escaping the cultural control of her ex-mother-in-law; and, as she stated, was a way of *"getting the confidence . . to just say goodbye to her and her standards and how she wants to live"*. This confidence came about for Jane through the physical management of her domestic space and we see a similar process happening for Margaret. For Anne the script employed was one of hope for the idealised home, but one that was founded upon an older script from childhood at the same time as being a reaction to that where she says: *"So I want to stop having to keep moving about, I want to be safe, I want to be comfortable, I want to feel . a part of a family and [Mm] . . I want to be at home [Yes]. I want a home [Yes]. I've never had a home"*. For these women and for other participants also, the physical domestic environment formed a very strong stage within which they could enact scripts that allowed escape and enhanced confidence, either in the present or in the future.

Continuing to think about the relevance of scripts, if we return to Emma's image (figure 5.1) and her comments about feeling caught between leaving and staying, we might argue that two scripts were competing with each other as she sought to find a way to carry on. On the one hand there is the script of the dutiful wife hoping that her marriage will be good again, whilst on the other there is the script represented lyrically about being a survivor and not wanting to have one's dignity compromised. What is of particular interest, given the subject of domestic violence and the participants involved, is the role that gender plays within the scripts employed. The 'dutiful wife' or 'dutiful daughter-in-law' is an obvious example of a particularly traditional gendered script, and in a similar way we might argue that after many decades of feminist thought and action the scripts of the 'survivor' and the 'independent woman' are equally common and gendered scripts, and ones that can be contrasted with the script of the 'helpless victim' that has been identified, employed and criticised within domestic violence literature (Walker 2000, 1979; Kirkwood, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). In addition, the script of the 'home-maker' can be argued as being predominantly a script that is targeted at women, especially when taking into account the editing and format of the kinds of magazines that women had access to when making collages – a style that would most probably be found in the majority of similar Sunday supplement and lifestyle magazines. The gendered script of the 'home maker' will be further in evidence in the next chapter where I consider how participants managed their relationships with children. The way in which

women imagined their homes, where this imagination drew upon common gendered or commercialised scripts, can also be considered as demonstrating the idea of imagination being situated (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

There is some similarity between the idea of scripts and the way in which narratives are constructed in response to pain and illness (Frank, 1995; Kleinmann, 1989). Both Frank and Kleinmann refer to the way in which narratives and explanations arise out of resistance to the body in pain. Frank makes a very clear connection between stories, narratives and the physical body, writing that 'storytelling is a privileged medium of the dyadic body' (Frank, 1995, p.36) adding that '[s]elves act in ways that choose their bodies, but bodies also create the selves who act' (p.40). Scripts, in the way that Cohen and Taylor (1990) write of them, exhibit something of the quality of illness narratives in the sense that they are not just mental processes and nor are they always conscious. Scripts, like illness narratives, are culturally absorbed and re-enacted by individuals, with that absorption and re-enactment being as much a process of physical action as it is of mental action. And like illness narratives, scripts operate within relationships between people rather than being monadic. My contention is then that the desire for a physically safe and comfortable home was, for the women who explored this, the conscious enactment of a script that resisted other scripts they wanted to escape from. In the same way that Frank's concept of *restoration narratives* (Frank, 1995) refers to narratives about the physical body, the women's scripts refer to narratives about physical environments. Furthermore the scripts were also about changing relationships, in the same way that illness narratives are, on one level, about describing and negotiating social relationships.

In Chapter 6 I return to women's representation of the home when thinking about the way in which women related to the past, the present and the future, and to how the home was seen as a potential space within which a reconstituted family could emerge. Here, I wish to look at images that whilst also exploring a sense of escape, do this in a way that goes beyond the domestic environment to incorporate the natural environment.

5.4 Nature

The theme of nature was one that emerged within all of the participants' images and therefore forms an important focus of attention. There is a direct link between how the women employed representations of nature and how they employed representations of home: the

physicality of the natural environment and the way in which nature contributed to feelings of freedom and self-determination mirrors similar association with the home.

One way in which nature was used was as a way of representing support experienced within the present. This has already been shown within figure 5.3 where Jane made an image that represented gardens and growth. In figure 5.8 we also see Anne using nature to think about support. Anne said of this image: *"The sun . the sun and the trees is, is, is again . what . a comfort to me [Yeah] . erm . it represents the environment and, and nature . and, and that's great comfort to me".* During the making of this image Anne spoke about feeling let down throughout her life, a feeling that was compounded by her experience of long-term illness. In particular she expressed anger towards social services, which was picked up by other participants and that I will expand upon in the following chapter. Rather than a direct representation of this lack of support, the image instead was a representation of what Anne described of those who were there to help her, including those who come and go, and who were represented by the angel-like figures found in the bottom-left of the image. Anne also spoke about having to rely upon belief in her own self for support.

Figure 5.8: Anne, group 1, week 2

My own response to this image is to say that I was drawn to the tactile dark shape in the foreground and the way it dominates the spectral figures behind it. There is the sense of people emerging and dis-appearing that Anne speaks about, especially the angels amongst the trees. There is also a sense of optimism in this image with the bright sun and the birds and the trees in bloom. The natural and the supernatural pre-dominate this image with the humans seeming to play just a small part, huddled together perhaps for protection against the black dog; although it is perhaps the dog that is providing the protection. It might be possible to read the dog as referring to the metaphor of depression being a black dog, but Anne did not allude to it in that way and the metaphor is not a particularly common one; I think therefore that the dog is just a dog – Anne's dog – that provided her with a feeling of support and comfort. The tactile qualities of the dog are mirrored in the way in which Anne has represented the trees and demonstrates how participants were able to use collage in a creative way.

The importance of presenting this image here is that whilst Anne's experience of support was mixed, the natural landscape is both a metaphor for the positive component of her experience of support and a literal representation of how she finds the natural environment to be, in her own words, *"a great comfort"*.

Where the natural environment is used as a metaphor for escape is evidenced within figure 5.9 produced by Carol. Of this image Carol said:

> *"And this one. Butterflies. Freedom. Clouds are breaking up, so giving me a clear sky. Done a flower because life is blossoming. Autumn leaves and you know. It was the time I was born really, autumn time and I just like it. It's so tranquil in a sense, and peaceful. But leaves being around and . . you know, because their starting a new life, their breaking up the old and coming in with the new."*

The focus for this image was also about home, but primarily this image is one in which nature is used very deliberately to act as a metaphor for feelings of peace and tranquillity. There is in this image an intriguing joining together of the inside and the outside with the sofa sitting amongst the fields and the sky. There is a very striking use of butterflies to represent freedom, along with the clouds to show something about clarity and space, with the butterflies being representative of a new beginning for Carol.

Figure 5.9: Carol, group 1, week 4

Overall this image is representative of how nature was used as a metaphor for transitions, and the image is a continuation of other images made by Carol that are positive in tone and reflect her sense of finding a safe home and a safe partner. I received a strong sense of hope and of looking forward with this image because the image is so dominated by the very bright butterflies and, as Carol noted when reflecting on this image at the end of her participation, this is one of the only images she made that does not include words, which therefore gives it a sense of being weightless almost. The cups appear as if they are floating and only the sofa is grounded. Interestingly, the conversation made whilst this image was made was at times hard to follow, being full of accounts of lack of support from social services and the pressure placed upon mothers, and yet none of that is represented in this image. This was a pattern that occurred often, where the conversation was not fully reflected in the images. This image appears to be an escape from the difficulties of the past and the present, via creative activities and meditation upon nature.

The link between the use of nature within women's images, and the idea of escape and harmony, continued by way of reference to taking holidays or being immersed in nature. Two examples of this are worth considering. Figure 5.10, was made by Margaret, and appears

within the same three-dimensional box that contained her image of the domestic space (figure 5.6).

About this aspect of the image Margaret stated that:

> *"And then I've still got the seaside picture [Yeah] . erm, with some boats, sunbeds represent a lot . just liking, like to relax. And then, there's an . . outdoor picture looking inside . . . cups on the table . so just nice . nice picture . relaxing picture . . . . I like . being surrounded by natural things . . to sit and hear the sea . the tide and waves and lapping, it's just a wonderful sound . . [So enjoying nature?] mm yes . yeah just being there, not necessarily walking far but just sitting and absorbing it."*

As we have already encountered, Margaret appreciated being able to expereince comfort and pleasure within the domestic space, and here we see that extended to her appreciation of the natural environment, inlcuding that encountered when travelling. On several occasions Margaret spoke about how important it was to have a car and to be able to travel as and when she pleased.

Figure 5.11: Lisa, group 3, week 6

Figure 5.11, produced by Lisa, also explores the explicit function of travel and holidays as a form of escape and pleasure. Lisa's interpreation of this image powerfully illustrates this process:

"*I notice my first painting was completely about avoidance of the topic whatsoever, I only wanted to think about nice things, escapist things, things that I'd done, places that I'd been, the travelling and everything and remember the good times. I don't like living in the past, I don't like being reminded of it, and I do not wish to be kept there. So that's why I was focussing on er the nice things that have happened in my life. So the first (indistinct – poster?) was all about positives and beautiful things."*

This image for Lisa then was not just a way of showing myself and the other participants the importance of travel and holidays for her; through the actual making of the image it was a way of remembering the good times and focusing upon luxury and pleasure as a way of not thinking about the difficult times in her past. The role of time and of creativity in women's

understanding of their experiences is explored more fully in the following two chapters, but here we see how creativity and imagination allowed Lisa to escape through the act of making and to escape via the mental process of recalling *"escapist things"*.

Figure 5.12: Emma, group 3, week 9

The use of nature within images also allowed for the representation of complex feelings such as survival, resilience and the ambivalence felt about choices made. This is best illustrated by images produced by Emma. Figure 5.12 shows a sun behind trees and the only comment she made about this image was that it represented her sense of *"not being able to see the wood for the trees".* As an image it felt ambiguous: Is the sun rising or setting? Is it an image of hope or of despair? It thus seemed to continue the theme that she started earlier (figure 5.1) to do with feeling caught between darkness and light, and of feeling that she was in a relationship where, using the lyrics of Elton John that Emma quoted herself, it felt as if 'It's two hearts living / In two separate worlds' (John & Taupin, 1989). Whatever the actual rational meaning of this image was, it is a good example of nature being used as metaphor for a feeling state; and of perhaps a wordless state at that. Another image made by Emma (figure 5.13) also makes reference to lyrics about sacrifice and survival, which again has a sense of

uncertainty in terms of the cactus looking vibrant and alive, yet having to survive within a dry environment.
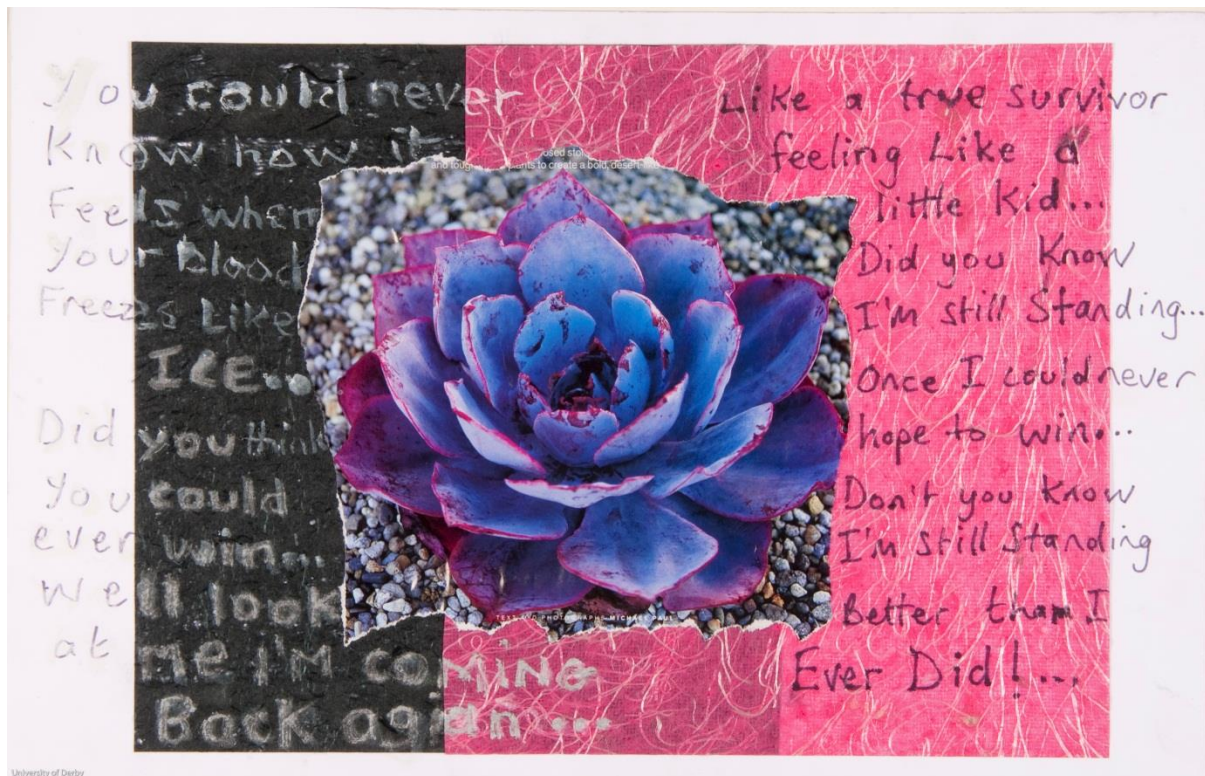
Figure 5.13: Emma, group 3, week 10

It is worth noting that Emma chose to provide her final evaluation in written form and therefore did not make reference to every image she made; she was also the woman whom felt to me to be the closest, chronologically, to the experience of leaving, and thus to be more unsure and less resolved about her decisions. It can be argued that she was at an earlier point in the process of making sense of her experiences and of acting decisively upon her choices – in comparison to Jane and Margaret for example. Her images certainly portray that sense of uncertainty. What helped Emma to engage so well with the process of participation was her artistic training. This training was something that she gave up whilst married, but had subsequently re-started following separation. Emma was thus able to make sophisticated use of visual styles and metaphors in her exploration of feelings that were still very raw.

Nature then was used by the women to represent different feelings; for some it was a representation of relaxation or calmness, for some it was used to denote self-determination or escape from control, for some it was a metaphor for uncertainty. The representation of nature was also at times very literal, showing that nature was an environment that some women desired to be in, including where it formed a component of being on holiday. In a similar way to how women had used representations of the domestic environment, representations of

nature were a way of fusing together the literal, the metaphoric, the remembered, the imagined and the desired. Similarly, the theoretical discussion begun when thinking about the domestic environment can continue when thinking about nature.

Just as the sensual quality of women's representations of the domestic environment was considered with reference to Pink's (2009) investigation of perceptions of cleanliness, Pink's (2007b) exploration of walking interviews within visual and sense-based research has resonance here, as does similar research conducted by O'Neill and Hubbard (2010), in that whilst we never physically strayed from the rooms within which the research took place, in an imaginative sense the women travelled far and wide, to places they had been and would like to go to. Of course the actual physicality of being in the natural environment was missing: the sounds, sights, smells, temperature, etc. Therefore such sensations were not available to elicit recollections or chains of association. However, if we follow the kind of arguments that Damasio (2004, 2000) makes about the neurological evidence that suggests that there is two-way causal link between mental and physical processes within the body, then where women visually created scenes of nature or called such scenes to mind something close to what Pink describes took place within my research. Pink describes one element of her experience of conducting a walking interview within a communal garden in the following way:

> This walk around the garden was an exercise in experiencing and imagining. The narrative that guided our walk through the material garden site referred to the garden as an imagined (and planned) place and involved continually comparing our present sensory embodied experiences of the garden with potential others: new textures under foot; new flower beds and aromas.
>
> (2007b, p.240)

Further on, when talking about gaining a 'sense of place' (p.240) through the acting of physical being in a place defined as such by a participant, Pink quotes from Steven Feld and Keith Basso in the following way: 'as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place' (Feld and Basso 1996 quoted in Pink, 2007b, p.240). This idea proposes that there is an intimate connection between the senses and physical places. In a later development of these ideas Pink introduces the concept of emplacement (2009) to talk about the way in which embodiment can be extended to become an integration of mind-body-environment. The concept of emplacement allows Pink to talk about the emplaced

ethnographer, which enhances the idea of the embodied ethnographer, who uses their senses and their imagination to both empathically connect to participants and to help share the participants emplaced and embodied experiences with a wider audience. My contention is that through evoking a sensual and embodied response, participants, in their employment of visual representation of real, imagined and metaphoric spaces, did enable a sense of emplacement for themselves and for me as a witness. The making of images and the employment of memory and imagination blurred the distinction between 'real' spaces and their visual representations; a distinction further blurred when participants were referring to those 'unreal' spaces that no longer existed or had yet to come into existence. This blurring or fusing of the real and the imagined is something that was observed both in women's representations of nature and of domestic spaces.

The theme of escape and resistance, as contextualised through the writing of Cohen and Taylor (1990) continued within women's representations of nature. Emma for example, when referring to figure 5.12, explicitly talks about escapism, with the image including representations of luxury, nature and holidays; whilst Margaret both showed (figure 5.10) and spoke about the importance of travel and nature to her sense of feeling relaxed. Cohen and Taylor make direct reference to travel and holidays as central methods within contemporary society through which individuals can, for a brief period, assume a different way of being. Alongside holidays they also place engagement with mass-culture and with art and refer to these together as new landscapes (p.130). Alongside these they place contemporary societies' focus upon self-discovery, which can be achieved in a number of ways such as therapy, exercise, and meditation, that they refer to as mindscaping (p.145). New landscapes and mindscaping, along with games and hobbies, constitute for Cohen and Taylor free areas that are 'place[s] where we can act out our fantasies or where action doesn't need any extrinsic fantasies to transform it' (p.113). Such free areas, it is suggested are sanctioned by society and therefore constitute popular and common means of both escape from repetition, but also as Cohen and Taylor identify, ways of expressing contentment with the status-quo. Such escapes are also precarious and very often fail to achieve the 'quest for identity' (p.153). Something then of Cohen and Taylor's consideration of free areas would seem to fit with how holidays were being used by women to experience a sense of relaxation and pleasure, that would seem to counter unhappiness with past or present circumstances; circumstances that Cohen and Taylor refer to as paramount reality. In Emma's images and words we also find plenty of evidence of mass-culture and art being used by her as ways of creating free spaces, and of escaping the paramount reality of living with a violent and controlling partner

and the uncertainty experienced after leaving. Margaret's reference to holidays and nature can be read as being more about satisfaction than about escape primarily because of the distance between living with violence and her participation.

The value of holidays in contributing to women's sense of freedom and self-determination is something also identified by Abrahams' (2010) interviews. There though the main issue to emerge was the constraints that limited financial resources imposed upon the ability to take holidays, although this in itself meant that women had to be resourceful. Abrahams' respondents also related how important it was to find space for themselves or to be with people they felt supported by. Margaret's image and account of how she managed her time mirrored this finding.

Nature as a source of pleasure and comfort can also be related to the way in which the physical qualities of home were identified with achieving pleasure and comfort, and both appeared to contribute to the creation of a sense of harmony for participants. The identification of pleasure and comfort with the notion of harmony is chosen because it aligns with the way in which Damasio, in writing about Spinoza's and psychologist Henry James' philosophy of mental adjustment to fear and sorrow (2004), says that the 'restoration of balance is an individual and internal task, something to be achieved when sophisticated thinking and reasoning provoke the appropriate emotion and feeling' (p.283). It also would seem to align with the concept of escape in the sense that actions, both mental and physical, are enacted with the explicit intention of achieving distance from either the reality of living within a violent and controlling partner, or the memory and psychological consequences that remain after successfully leaving that partner. The search for harmony through nature can also, like the management of the home, be read as being part of a restoration narrative (Frank, 1995); whilst nature as a metaphor for uncertainty contributes to the representation of what Frank refers to as chaos narratives and we see this within Emma's images (figure 5.13 & 5.13). Although by showing and telling her story in the sophisticated way that she did, Emma, it can be argued, was imposing a narrative structure upon her experiences so that to say it was only chaotic is incorrect. As Frank states, '[t]o turn chaos into a verbal story is to have some reflective grasp of it' (1995, p.98), and to this can be added that turning chaos into a physical image counters the kind of chaotic experience within which 'the body is imprisoned in the frustrated needs of the moment' (p.98).

A last point here to be made about nature, that relates it to earlier discussions about imagination and storytelling, is to rethink what Lloyd (1993) suggested about the place of nature and domesticity within western philosophy and particularly its association within

emotions, feelings, lack of rationality and femininity. On the surface it would seem that the way in which representations of nature were used by women within their images fitted with this contention, but if we view the engagement with nature as being part of an active process that was both emotional and rational, then we see that nature, for the participants of this research, formed an important literal and symbolic space within their on-going management of the effects of living with violence and control.

5.5   Summary

This chapter has presented the idea that the domestic and natural environments are important places where women who have experienced domestic violence can engage with processes that contribute towards greater levels of self-determination and self-esteem. Some of this is achieved through physical action such as the choice of decoration or the visiting of holiday destinations. Some of this is achieved through the way in which domestic and natural environments come to symbolise both hopes and anxieties; with the use of an arts-based methodology allowing women to externalise those symbols in ways that would seem to have added to greater self-esteem and self-awareness. This process of externalisation will be explored in a later chapter, but here there is enough evidence to suggest that the physicality of image-making allows the relationship between different processes - the physical, emotional and cognitive - to be embodied within images. This is a process that has greater pertinence when attention is upon the contemplation of physical environments.

The images and words presented reinforces those issues Abrahams (2010) identified when asking women about the role of home within their life after domestic violence, and in particular the notion of the transformation of the home contributing to confidence about decision making. Likewise, the focus upon holidays fits with the experience of the respondents of Abrahams' research. Whilst the images and words presented here do not throw further light on the financial and practical barriers that get in the way of women finding and creating homes – something that Abrahams' research identified - what I believe is shown in my research is that home can contribute to women's needs following experiences of domestic violence on a number of levels. To help explain this a little further it is necessary to return to how Abrahams makes use of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1987 cited in Abrahams, 2010) to frame her findings. Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes, in ascending order of importance, the following needs: physiological; safety; belongingness; esteem and self-actualisation. Home, in the way it was represented by the participants of my research,

seems to occupy all points within that hierarchy. For example: physiological needs include shelter; safety needs include security, protection and safety; esteem needs includes self-confidence; and self-actualisation incorporates the development of one's own capabilities. All these needs were evident within the women's words and images, and the way in which women expressed their desire for a place of safety and comfort and then set about achieving that indicates that home is a dynamic physical, social and psychological space. The need for belongingness within Maslow's model includes being accepted, giving and receiving love, and connection to others. As will be explored in the next chapter, these needs did play a part in women's thoughts about home, but due to their extensive appearance within other themes require separate attention.

The holistic appreciation of home, that incorporates physiological, psychological, sociological and existential needs, resonates with the way in which embodiment has been thought through within this thesis, in particular the bringing together of internal and external processes. Where these processes align, and where different needs are addressed within the physicality and concept of home, there is a possibility to view home as a means of achieving harmony in the same way that nature had this quality for participants. On an aesthetic level, it is possible to observe this sense of harmony in some of the images produced by women. For example images produced by Jane (figures 5.3 and 5.4) demonstrate, to my eyes at least, a choice of colour, texture and composition, that is more harmonious than those produced by Anne (figure 5.7). Listening to Jane's and Anne's story it would be possible to say that the level of harmony evident in their images reflects their experiences of home, with Jane's experiences being more settled and harmonious than Anne's. I am though hesitant to impose such a reading as it comes too close to a form of diagnosing and analysing images that does not fit comfortably with the methodology employed, led as it is by feminist and participatory principles. Applying such a reading also gives too much weight to my own aesthetic sensibilities. Despite these caveats, the notion of harmony does fit with an idea that women develop strategies to resist the effects of living with violence (Allen, 2011) whilst actively working towards a reinvestment in their own identities and life-plans (Abrahams, 2007). Reading Brison's (2002) account of how she managed her own identity and future following traumatic violence, it is evident that such trauma severely disrupts any sense of balance or harmony a person might have, and seems to disconnect the person from the world, from others and from the ordinary flow of time; the desire to escape from this experience of disconnection and the desire for greater harmony can therefore be seen as quite necessary. The physicality of the trauma often experienced within domestic violence might also increase

women's sense of disconnection from the physical world and limit their ability to feel safe within it. Frohmann's (2005) visual exploration of places of safety suggests that the women who have experienced domestic violence have to work hard to create a sense of safety within their own homes and the external environment, and the images produced within my research confirm this.

However, as already indicated, home and nature, as elements within women's attempts at escape or desire for harmony, are though not fixed or linear in progression. We have seen how ideas about home and nature were, for some women, expressions of ambivalence about their choices in the past, the present and the future, so that whilst there was an identification of how things might be better, the route to that place was not always clear. The way in which home and nature were represented by women, and the processes women were embodying within their images, did seem to exhibit then a sense of complexity that would align with Frohmann's observation, made about women's perceptions of safety and strategies for making their homes safe, that 'safety is a fluid concept' (2005, p.1397). This view of home, nature, and the desire for escape and harmony, being part of a fluid and dynamic strategy can also be aligned with one way of re-interpreting Frank's (1995) understanding of narratives of illness. Restitution and chaos narratives have already been suggested as possible ways of reading the women's stories; but given the dynamic and ambivalent qualities of the women's words and images, a more appropriate reading can be achieved by employing an active recovery narrative, as developed by Rebecca Barnes (2013), when responding to the women's stories. An active recovery narrative is one that is 'underpinned by women's recognition that they have been adversely affected by their abusive experiences, and that they need to take measures to work toward a successful recovery from these' (p.392). Barnes also suggests that an active recovery narrative represents the transition that takes place in moving from a chaos narrative to a restitution and quest narrative, and involves women taking control, seeking support and 'spending time learning to love and discover themselves' (p.393). As the label suggests, active recovery is not a simple linear process, and challenges the idea that women who have left domestic violence seamlessly move through phases of recovery and survival until having 'moved on'. There can be a movement towards and away from restitution, and as some of the images and words in my own research showed, there can be a pervading sense of ambivalence within women's narratives. The idea of active recovery also resonates with the way in which Kirkwood (1993) describes women's resistance to violence and strategies for leaving in a way that places attention upon agency rather than passivity. Emma's image of living within a violent home

(figure 5.1) for example would seem to show how, despite the sense of darkness, she was able to not lose sight of a lighter future; and the meaning she found within certain song lyrics sustained her both during and after living with violence, suggesting that similar strategies are employed both before and after leaving, so that resistance and recovery forms a single process, even where the worth and success of that is not always immediately apparent. Jane's story also suggests that strategies of resistance and escape continue after leaving a violent partner, especially where there is still pressure arising from an extended family or there are child-contact issues.

Despite the appearance of uncertainty and ambivalence for some women, the role of home and of nature within women's stories demonstrates the power and importance of both imagination and desire within women's reflections upon their experiences and their strategies for the management of self via escape and harmony. Imagination and desire have both been presented as important components of new-paradigm ethnographies (Denzin, 2000), emancipatory feminist agendas (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002), and ways of re-making the self after trauma (Brison, 2002). The ways in which women used imagination and desire to express their work towards emancipation and change confirms this view, whilst the expression of imagination and desire through attention to the physicality of home, nature, comfort and pleasure supports the idea of imagination being embodied. In addition, the ambivalence that emerged at points within women's stories, alongside the representations of emancipation and change, confirms Murphy's (2012) view about the need to pay attention to corporeal vulnerability within feminist ontologies and emancipatory narratives.

The focus in this chapter has been upon the physical and corporal properties of home and nature and how those two contribute to notions of escape and harmony. The following chapter will continue to think about home, escape and harmony, but there the focus will be upon how those things relate to women's search for an ideal family. I want though to end this chapter by presenting one last image that I think encapsulates and embodies much of the foregoing discussion. It is another image that shows the three-dimensional box created by Margaret (figure 5.14) that she used to explore her relationship to home, nature and family.

This image shows neatly how the physical and the emotional can come together through the use of representations of materials: the stone to represent the sorrow of living with a violent and controlling partner in the past; the cloth to represent the desire for pleasure, joy and comfort in the present and the future.

Figure 5.14: Margaret, group 2, weeks 6-9

It shows how nature, in the form of the image of the garden, can be a symbol for the transition between the past and present, between darkness and light and between outside and inside. In Margaret's own words:

> "And inside the box I've put . some, a stone . floor, with stone stairs . and . the wording is "Design with Stone" [Mm] to represent the coldness of my past . . [Right] . and then . in the middle of the box . it's a garden of, it looks like tea lights but it must be not, not tea lights but that's what it looks just a picture of . lights [Yeah]. And I've done that to represent seeing the light from changeover from the stoniness (indistinct) light, and then I've done wording "Pleasure Zone" and something pretty and embroidered . . . . [And are they both happening in the, kind of in the present then, those two things?] erm, that was the past (indistinct) that is more, I like the pleasure zone [Yes] yes, I do like pleasure . when I can I have it."

The transition from cold to warm, and from dark to light, was explored by Jane and Emma respectively, and here we see in Margaret's image a coming together of those two metaphors, along with attention to both home and nature. Not shown in figure 5.14 is what was written on the top of the box. Margaret had pasted three phrases onto the top of the box, together with images of pot-plants, food and decorative patterns; these were: 'ESCAPE TO THE INNER', 'QUALITY' and 'makes all the difference'. Alongside those other things Margaret had represented and spoken about, these words contain a powerful yet ambiguous summary of the focus of this chapter: the desire for escape, the role of sensual pleasure within that escape attempt, but also an uncertain reference to what is meant by 'inner'. Is 'inner' a reference to a physical space such as the home? A reference to the interior psychological world? Or, as seems more likely and as shown in this chapter, a subtle synthesis of the two? I shall turn more towards the psychological element of that synthesis in Chapter 7, but first I turn to how women explored relationships and forms of support.

6 : Relationships and Social Support

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus upon the ways in which women explored the nature and quality of their relationships with others, especially with their immediate family, and of how those relationships aided and hindered their transition away from domestic violence. This emphasis follows on from the focus of the previous chapter where it pays attention to the link between home and relationships, and in its use of the idea of escape and harmony as a way of understanding the women's representations of family. Like the previous chapter, the future is held to be a legitimate focus of attention. What this chapter will add is the notion of *becoming* and *returning* in terms of how and where women placed their idea of family in the context of their past experiences of and future hopes. Family includes partners, children and extended relations. This chapter focuses then upon the relational and social aspects of women's stories. It also pays attention to how women encountered support offered by friends and family, as well as that offered by different agencies and services, and so will be referring back to those texts within Chapter 2 that offered an analysis and critique of policy and practice pertaining to domestic violence in the UK. The key finding here is that where services valued women's stories and involved them in decision making they were viewed more favourably than when they made decisions for women or failed to listen to their concerns.

The stories told about family, especially those about children, are the stories that affected me the most during the research. Being a parent myself and hearing stories of loss, estrangement, and frustrated hopes of return was difficult, precisely because it resonated with some of my own experiences as a parent. The sadness, guilt and vulnerability that it evoked in me, fed into how I struggled at times to identify a distinction between research and therapy, in terms of how I responded to women when they told these kinds of stories. It enabled me to feel emotionally closer to the women but also anxious about wanting to help in some way. This is an example of my anxiety about research becoming therapy and I will explore this uncertainty in greater detail when evaluating the research process later on. What is important to note here is that the stories were emotionally powerful and that some of that power is, I feel, evident within the images and the words presented in this chapter. Building

upon the last chapter, I start by examining how representation of the physical home included it being a place within which a family already existed, before considering how women represented the home as a potential space to which the family might return to and thus become whole again.

Ideas about escape and harmony (Cohen & Taylor, 1992) introduced in the previous chapter are used here to think through women's hopes and plans for a future family, whilst Brison's (2002) work is used to consider how, following domestic violence, perceptions of time become disrupted, and how relationships contribute to women's sense of self. New theoretical material introduced in this chapter includes ideas around the role of gender in social narratives about the home and the family (Bradley, 2013; Pink, 2012, 2004; Dryden, 1999).

6.2   Home and family

We have already seen how Jane used the management of her home as a way of asserting control over her own life and as a way of rejecting the values of her ex-partner's family. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 are views of the same three-dimensional image that was presented in the last chapter. Figure 6.1 shows again that part of the image that explored Jane's thoughts about how she arranged her kitchen and chose food in ways that rejected what she felt forced to adhere to by her ex-partner's family. At the side of the box we catch sight of a collaged image of a mum and her son using a laptop. Figure 6.2 represents Jane's son, whom she represented by reference to a local football team, the story of the Lion King, and images of the computer-game characters Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog.

Of the representation of the mother and child Jane said:

"That's me and (son's name) on a laptop, that (ex-partner's name) and his mum always thought that, no, I couldn't enter the future, you know, going on a laptop and everything. They were just holding us back all the time."

These comments about taking control of how she parented her son were supported by earlier comments relating to another image:

"And I always take him to the pantomime, Snow White, but they've always said "Oh it's the wrong thing to do. (Ex-partner's name) could be making money. He's not the time to take (son's name) to the pantomime". Well so what now. It's: I'll take (son's name) to the pantomime on my own."

Figure 6.1: Jane, group 1, weeks 8-10

As we have seen already, Jane was working hard to create space and distance between how she conducted her life and how her ex-partner's family wanted her to behave. That work included management of the domestic space as well as her parenting choices. The box she created combines these two elements showing how the creation of home, for Jane, is intimately related to her parenting and her thoughts about being a mother. In the way that the box is constructed, that which is being moved away from is placed internally, whilst that which is being striven for is placed externally, so that here, the sense of what is internal is that which is to be hidden rather than being a place of retreat and safety, as occurred in the images presented in the previous chapter (figures 5.10 and 5.14). Elsewhere Jane had said how she did try to keep her son in touch with elements of the culture of his father's family and with elements of her own culture. The box, with one culture being represented internally and one externally, is a visual representation of how she was managing that balance.

Figure 6.2: Jane, group 1, weeks 8-10[14]

The role that the physical home played in the relationship Jane had with her son is further explored where Jane said the following:

> "Because it was a risk, I didn't know a year back if I was doing the right thing, but (son's name) was happy straight away when we moved to another house without his dad."

Here, Jane identifies how in hindsight the choice to move into a new house made a difference to her son, but was a risky choice to make, and the feeling of risk is one that resonates with those other stories women told where ambivalence and anxiety about choices made pervaded their telling; Emma's images and words for example expressed this uncertainty (figures 5.12 and 5.13). Jane though was at a point where the choices made seemed to be working well for her and so her representation of home and family was one that had a sense of optimism and wholeness. Thinking about harmony again, Jane was representing that she had achieved some sense of harmony with respect to the feelings she had about her parenting choices. As Paula

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[14] Map has been edited to maintain anonymity of location.

Wilcox (2000; 2006) identifies, lone parenting for women who have left a violent partner is often fraught with anxiety both about the financial and material consequences of leaving and the social narratives and scripts that values parenting by heterosexual couples over single parents, so that the potential shame associated with domestic violence is added to by the shame associated with being a single parent. What Jane showed was that she was managing the anxiety she had about being a single parent by actively managing both her domestic environment and her relationships.

What Jane's story also highlights is that domestic violence can extend beyond the immediacy of intimate partners to incorporate the extended family, who are able to assert control after the intimate relationship has ended and where children are involved. The role of the extended family within domestic violence is acknowledged by the Home Office (2013) and Women's Aid's (2013a) definitions of domestic violence. It has also been documented as being an especially common pattern within South Asian women's experience of domestic violence (Bano, 2010; Gill, 2004), and in Jane's story we see that it appears in other communities also. A further example of Jane exerting control over her home and parenting is shown in figure 6.3 where she represents, amongst other things, the way in which she has created a home for herself and her son. Of this image Jane stated:

"They didn't like that. They didn't like the kitchen, the carpets. Just all little things that built up [Mm]. How could this little boy . . and me . enjoy the home life if it was always being scrutinised [Mm]. . . And that's why I identified it as a spider's web [Mm] I was trying to get out of . . But until that point I'd not . realised that . it was (ex-partner's name) mum's web I was trying to get out of."

Whilst this is to me still very clearly an image made by Jane it has a different quality to many of Jane's other images in that it is less symmetrical: there is more variety within the collage images used in this image for example. There are the previously explored ideas of comfort and autonomy in this image, which come together in the representations of soft furnishings, and images of nature also make an appearance. Reference to Jane's past as a fashion designer is shown in the mannequins and sewing machine. The metaphor of the web is present within this image, that has been used elsewhere (Kirkwood, 1993) to refer to women's attempts to escape from domestic violence, and it is tellingly placed next to the word "FREE". In the way

that Jane talked during the making of this image there was concern about the extended family and cultural difference. The most striking component I find is the contrast between the soldier and the soft-toys. Jane stated that this represented her need to protect her son and it is certainly a striking way of showing this, and it is quite unique to be using the metaphor of being a soldier when referring to responses to domestic violence. In the way the image is constructed it appears as if the soldier is either targeting or protecting all that is above them on the image, so that there is a strong sense of gaining control and managing what is hers, and of not allowing the interference of others, especially interference from her ex-partner's mother. The solider can be read as being representative of Jane perceiving herself as being a fighter or protector of her home and her son against the hostile forces of the ex-partner's mother. The metaphor of the fighter in this instance is closer to the metaphor of the resistor than those of the survivor or victim, which are frequent ways of referring to women's response to domestic violence. The image of the soldier resonates with the metaphor of war that is commonly used to represent responses to cancer, where it is critiqued for overly valuing an aggressive stance at the expense of other legitimate experiences (Radley, 2009; Sontag, 2009). As a metaphorical response to domestic violence it is perhaps this association with aggression that makes its use powerful due to the social messages that sanction against women indulging in overt expressions of aggression and anger (Brown, 1998; Bjorkvist & Niemala, 1992).

Whilst Jane's story involved a sense of optimism in terms of having full access to her child and feeling like she was able to exert control over her role as parent, the more common experience represented by women during the research was that of estrangement from children, and the frustrations and hope of attempting to regain access to their children. Starting with Anne's story, we are presented with a particularly harrowing representation of what it means to be estranged from one's child. Like a number of other women she responded to the idea of creating a three-dimensional image in the form of a box and used this to explore her thoughts and feelings about the relationship she had with her son. Figure 6.4 shows the inside of the box, and like Jane she chose to use the interior space of the box as a place within which to represent what was difficult to remember.

Figure 6.3: Jane, group 1, week 5

Figure 6.4: Anne, group 1, weeks 8-11[15]

The extract from a conversation between Anne and Jane during the final evaluation captures the essence of what Anne was trying to portray in the interior of the box:

> *"I were more pleased with the inside of the box than the outside because that really represents the past [Yeah] and the darkness, and, and, and . and . ya'know . to shut that away and thing that's gone know. That's great (laughter).* **Jane:** *(indistinct) there's bits you don't want to come back.* **Anne:** *Yeah.* **Jane:** *That's what mine is.* **Anne:** *But I had to, I just felt that I had to represent . . how . . . dark and dirty [Yes] and . wrong . . it all is /[That past has been]/ and I don't feel that . . it is my fault; it's what other people have done to me; and it's wrong. So yeah goodbye (laughter)."*

Further on Anne stated that:

> *"I am who I am. I make mistakes. But everybody does, everybody. Nobody's a perfect mother . nobody's a perfect person."*

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[15] Image edited to maintain anonymity of child

It only appears marginally within the transcripts, but Anne was very emotional when talking about her images or in conversation generally. My impression was of someone who was both nervous and angry. Anne, it seemed, had experienced violence and control throughout her life as well as many experiences of loss: loss of relationship and loss of home. Here, within the interior of the box, she seemed to be trying to contain some of those feelings she had about her past and, as indicated in her words, trying to come to terms with who she was, including her role as a mother. Crucially, for the discussion here about children, is the inclusion of the small photograph of her son and the fact that she had placed this within the interior of the box, that for Anne represented the past. Anne spoke about having to leave her son behind in order to escape and the struggle ever since to regain access. The inclusion of the watch face is significant and indicates clearly that Anne was thinking about her relationship with time. During the week she made this image she said that she was not sure what was going to happen in the future and that regardless of whatever happened the relationship with her son would always be present.

The sense of loss and hope, both present and future, continued on the exterior of Anne's box, as shown in figures 6.5 and 6.6. Here the words "Come Home" dominate, and very powerfully and simply communicate Anne's desire for a reunion with her son. Anne stated that the exterior represented her thoughts about the future but she was uncertain about what this would entail and thus the very simple message. Not quite visible is a padlock she has placed on the lid of the box that she indicated was about locking away the past and taking control of the process of hiding and revealing things to other people. As a whole then, the box that Anne created represents her relationship with her past, present and future, with the three dimensional quality of the image allowing her to take control of what is visible to other people, that in this case was myself and other participants. So whilst the box is a very personal exploration and expression of Anne's thoughts and feelings, it is also an image that is public and social (Huss, 2013; Chaplin, 1994).

In terms of my own embodied response, there is something very private and intimate about the internal space of the box that comes across as very old and sad. There is a quality about the box that did, for me, embody how I perceived Anne during her participation. This embodiment is also reflected in the way that Anne spoke within the final evaluation: her vulnerability and her strong desire to make sense of what had happened.

Figure 6.5: Anne, group 1, weeks 8-11

Figure 6.6: Anne, group 1, weeks 8-11

Together, the images and the spoken word work well to portray and evoke for me the effect domestic violence had upon Anne: that it created a sense of uncertainty and frustration,

although this had not completely taken away her desire to be strong or to carry on or her fundamental belief in herself. I find that looking at the box, knowing how it refers to her feelings of loss for her son and the longing to find him very difficult. It evokes a lot of sadness in me, and this is to do with my own identity as a parent and my own experiences of not always having the access that I desire. Estrangement can feel very physical for me and I imagine that this is even more so for a mother. The box and the words "Come Home" can be understood as a calling out in both hope and pain. In many ways this image, because it shows Anne's struggle to understand her estrangement from her son, comes close to what Frank would term a chaos narrative (1995), whereby the telling and showing of a story becomes part of the process of trying to make sense of the experience that the story refers to.

By using the words "Come Home" Anne introduces the theme of home being a potential space into which children might return. And for Anne, the material reality of what home was for her was as uncertain as the possibility of a reunion with her son. We have already seen how home can be as much an imaginary space as it can be an actual space; here that sense of home being an imaginary space is contributed to by the further addition of thoughts about children. It is this idea that leads to the notion of becoming and returning. Becoming a mother and part of family involves an element of return: a return of children, of the home, and of safety; and we have already seen that for Anne her imagined home was in part based upon an uncertain past, leading to a synthesis of the past and the future.

The sense of a longing for family, motherhood and home can be explained by making reference to the social construction of gender. Candice West and Don Zimmerman (2002) use the term 'doing gender' to describe the 'complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"' (p.4). These natures include the socially proscribed and gendered roles of wife (Dryden, 1999), mother (Bradley, 2013) and homemaker (Pink 2012, 2004). There is the argument that doing gender would be better thought of as becoming gender to better reflect the on-going performance involved in how individuals work towards the alignment of their identity with socially accepted scripts and narratives (Villa, 2011); a performance that has to take account not only of gender but also ethnicity, class, sexuality and health. Whether gender is thought of as a process of doing or of becoming, from a social constructionist understanding it is situated and a potential cause of identity anxiety where reality does not match up with an imagined ideal. It is here that we find Anne's and other women's thoughts about home and family exhibiting examples of gender being socially constructed and performed. Where Anne states that *"[n]obody's a perfect mother"* there is a deliberate and

explicit resistance against those social messages that classify what being a good parent means. Like Jane's image of the soldier it challenges conventional ideas about femininity at the same time as exhibiting anxiety about that potential transgression.

The idea of home being a space that has the potential for the return of children was repeated by Carol and best expressed in her own creation of a three-dimensional container.

Figure 6.7: Carol, group 1, weeks 7-10

Figure 6.7 shows the exterior the box the Carol created. The words "New Life" and "Welcome Home" appear on the lid and the side of the box; neatly combining the sense of hope in the creation of something new with the desire for a return to something that has passed. Carol had three children, one of whom died naturally in infancy, and two others who she had limited contact with. That limited contact caused Carol great frustration and anger that was directed towards the family of her ex-partner who controlled that access, and towards Social Services and the legal system whom she experienced as being insensitive and controlling. I shall return to these thoughts about encounters with agencies a little later but what is of interest here is the similarity between Carol and Anne in their experience of estrangement from their children. The key difference between Carol and Anne was the sense of optimism and hope that was stronger for Carol than it was for Anne. This was reflected in

the narrative they provided about access to children, with Carol at least having some access, even though it was not enough. It was also reflected in the objects they created. Figure 6.8 shows a close up of the interior of Carol's box and it stands in marked contrast to that of Anne's. Whereas Anne's was dark and fragmented, Carol's is brighter and more coherent. It represents how Carol had, in her new home, created a child's bedroom in readiness for the eventual and hoped for return of her children.

Figure 6.8: Carol, group 1, weeks 8-10

This creation of a child's bedroom is a powerful symbol of hope and return, and of the home as a potential space within which a family can be re-formed or returned to. A final image of the box that Carol created (figure 6.9) shows both the exterior and interior of that box, showing how the home that Carol created was for her a "safe haven" into which her children could return.

Figure 6.9: Carol, group 1, weeks 8-10

About the box, Carol explained:

> *"But this bo . I suppose the last two, the one what I just explained with this picture and that box . are the two that I have mainly like proper put me heart and soul into them more [Yeah]. And at front of this box, I've not quite finished it but it says new life on it [Yeah] and you open the box and there's my new life that I want . You know I feel really (indistinct / loved?). And it's all yellow and bright and glittery. Erm, and that's for me boys . 'Welcome Home'. You're back where you belong, with us and the family, you know."*

Adding further on that:

> *"But there's Toy Story posters on that wall, which again being a bedroom, we've just done a bedroom for (son's name) . er, when he comes. And, you know, we've done it as 'kiddy' as we can. And so that's representing doing the bedroom."*

For Carol then the making of the box was an important act that she was able to engage fully with and its primary focus was upon how she was creating a safe and welcome home for her children. The sense of optimism shown in these images of Carol's work, where the home becomes a container for a hoped for and imagined return to a safe and complete family, is contrasted with another image (figure 6.10) made by Carol; this time made about six months later in the third research group, which allows for a longitudinal component within Carol's story.

Figure 6.10: Carol, group 3, week 6

At the time that figure 6.10 was made, Carol had not had contact with one of her sons for 3 months and therefore much of the anger and frustration she felt had returned. The image shows this sense of frustration in the form of 'snakes and ladders', whereby there is a movement backwards and forwards on the journey towards gaining full access to her children. Carol said "*I can move on but then I take another two steps back sometimes*". The hand with the word "STOP" written across it referred to Carol being told by others to stop trying to rush the process of regaining access, but she her self wanted time to speed up. It felt,

she said, like she was on *"borrowed time"*. Carol spoke about Social Services imposing certain conditions upon her gaining more access to her children. This included living in a safe environment and addressing her emotional well-being. The creation of a safe home had then, for Carol, very real implications, as did making use of her participation in the research in terms of helping her to make sense of her feelings. The problem for Carol was that the decision about access to her children still felt out of her control with the timing of any decision being unclear. There is a marked similarity between this image and figure 6.4 that shows the interior of the box made by Anne and includes a photograph of her son and a watch face. Both Carol and Anne explicitly reference thoughts and feelings about time in relationship to access to children. Whether that is about time stopping or speeding-up, about the past or the future, is not entirely clear; but what does seem to be the case is that the experience of time in relationship to access to children becomes problematic and uncertain and in a state of discord. Time also seemed to be experienced as being out of their control when it came to issues of when and where they would see their children again.

The importance of children within some of the stories told during the research confirms what Abrahams (2010) found in her interviews: that women placed children very centrally within their lives, basing many of their decisions upon the desire to parent their children in a way that was good for the children and countered the perceived negative effects that domestic violence had upon their children. As in Abrahams' (2010) interviews, there was also the appearance of guilt, anxiety and determination, with respect to parenting. As Abrahams points out herself, the impact of domestic violence upon children is well documented (Mullender *et al,* 2002; Hague *et al,* 1996). Hague, Harvey and Willis (2012), in an overview of the effects of domestic violence upon children, as well as noting the long-term psychological harm done to children witnessing domestic violence, identify studies which critique the way in which mothers do not receive the support required to enable them to look after their children, or are hampered by bureaucracy, leading to a lack of trust between mothers and social workers (Stanley *et al.* 2010 cited in Hague, Harvey & Willis, 2012). It would seem that the women with children who took part in my research were well aware of the need to provide a safe home for the children, now and in the future, and were prone to deep feelings of anxiety about how they would do this, but each of them in some way had also experienced difficult relationships with Social Services in their journeys towards this, that undermined their confidence about being mothers, although not their determination to become part of a cohesive family.

What the women's stories also revealed is how the physical home operates as an important symbolic site for the management of relationships. As Pink (2012) notes in her investigation of the physical and sensual qualities of everyday life, the negotiation of domestic tasks and the management of the home can be informed by the relationships that occupants have. Pink gives an example of how one woman based her laundry drying choices upon her husband's dislike of using radiators to dry laundry. Whilst it is possible to imagine such a dynamic within the context of a controlling relationship being a trigger for abuse and violence, the point that Pink makes is that aesthetic choices within the home are a product of the social relationships that exist within the home. As Pink (2004) states when considering the limits of her own research '[t]he home is not always a site for the production of happy empowered identities, but might also be a place of violence, uncomfortable secrets and violence' (p.23). The women's stories of home that I have presented here would certainly seem to indicate that they very consciously perceived the home as a product of, and response to, social relationships; not only current relationships between those who lived in the home, but also as a rejection of problematic past and present relationships. With respect to children, the home was viewed as a potential site for the existence of future relationships.

In the previous chapter it was suggested that home is perceived by women and men in different ways (Malos and Hague, 1997 cited in Abrahams, 2010) in terms of it being a place of work or a place of leisure. Using the examples of how women had made choices of decoration, I suggested that participants were subverting a reading of home for women being purely a place of work. Here, when thinking about home and relationships, we find that the women were attempting to take control of the home in order to manage their familial and social relationships. In this sense the home can be thought of as a place of work, with that work being of the emotional variety. This image of women as home-makers, decorating and managing their homes for personal satisfaction and pleasure, as well as employing the home as a way of rebuilding familial relationships raises some important questions about gender and home. As Gillian Rose (1993) in her examination of feminism and geography explains, the home has been viewed by some feminists as a 'site of women's part within the labour of reproduction of the capitalist system' (p.54), and thus a symbol of women's oppression within capitalism, whilst simultaneously being a neglected private space within those masculinist geographies that place greater emphasis upon the understanding of public spaces. For Rose there was a need to reconsider women's active participation and engagement with space and, in a clear precursor to other kinds of emancipatory projects, to imagine different spaces; so that in response to the sense of oppression and fear that Rose feels about particular

spaces (the city at night for example), she writes that '[b]eing en-gendered as feminine means that I too imagine somewhere beyond capture. I am not sure what this elsewhere would be like; but I'm certain that it would not be like here and now' (p.143). The way in which the women's stories involved the imagination of future domestic spaces has already been explored, with particular emphasis upon the physicality of home; in this chapter, those stories that emphasis the home as an expression of an imagined family have been presented. In both cases we find that home has been experienced as a site of oppression for the women, showing perhaps that changes to the division of labour within society has changed only slightly over four decades, with Pink's (2012, 2004) work upon domestic spaces and everyday life certainly suggesting that the management of the home is still predominantly a female task. In both cases though, home is also experienced as a site for liberation and empowerment: in the present and in the imagined future. The quality of that imagined future is shaped by what has been, with the sense of becoming and returning being joined together in this imagined future, so that the return of children offers the chance for women to become part of a harmonious family within a safe and comfortable home. Following the ideas set forth in the previous chapter about how women imagined their futures, thoughts about a future family can be taken as another example of how women attempted to escape from their present lives into the ideal of the imagined future family in the same way that they did with the imagined home. The home is therefore a physical and a relational space, with both elements being contingent upon the other.

As already indicated, an important element of women's attempt to become, or to return to, an ideal family, was the kinds of support they received from different sources, such as Social Services and friends. But before going on to consider in greater detail how the women encountered support it is worth taking some time to think about the implications of current UK government policy upon what women are trying to achieve, in terms of the creation of safe spaces that have the potential to be homes to which their children can return. The current UK government policy that will most impact upon this aim is the spare room tariff – more commonly referred to as the 'Bedroom Tax' - that sees the capping of housing benefit based upon the number of people in a household in relationship to the size of the house; so that having a spare un-occupied bedroom is seen as unnecessary and housing benefit being capped accordingly (HMSO 2012b). Changes to housing benefit are part of wider welfare reforms, many of which will impact negatively upon those who are already made vulnerable by domestic violence. Whilst Women's Aid has lobbied hard for the changes to benefits to take account of women's refuge services (Women's Aid, 2013b), the

effect of limiting payments of housing benefits to those people with unoccupied rooms will potentially make it even harder for women such as Carol and Anne to plan for the return of their children. At the time of writing the changes to benefits have only just been introduced and so their longer term impact is yet to be quantified beyond anecdotal evidence and speculation; however, if the changes do mean that women have to limit their plans of how they will create a home that can welcome back their children then this may clash with the targets set for them by Social Services in terms of providing suitable accommodation. There is provision within the changes to housing benefit that means that foster carers will not be penalised for having unused bedrooms; there would also appear to be a need to lobby for the provision of a similar clause that acknowledges the particular circumstances that families separated through domestic violence are confronted by.

6.3   Relationships as support

As well as women expressing their thoughts and feelings about relationships in the context of the home and family they also explored relationships as they both contributed to and detracted from a sense of support. At various points during their participation women thought about the kinds of support that they had received during their transition away from domestic violence. This support came from family, friends, Women's Aid, Social Services and legal agencies. When providing a direction to construct stories, I had asked the participants to think about the kinds of support they had received or might wish for in the future, and a number of the images already shown incorporated a consideration of support. In particular, Margaret's images of the comfortable and cosy home and her thoughts about travel included reference to the support she had received from other people. The following conversation took place about one image that Margaret created to do with how she perceived support in the present:

> "[I think we were looking at er what kind of support you have now] Right, so yes, meeting, talking and relaxing. And having some meals out and driving. So yeah [Yeah. So how would you summarise what that image shows about support now?] I still want to do brilliant things in every month . erm, but I still need support . . erm . so yes it . . . . yeah . I think I'll always need support [And how are you defining that support?] Erm, just meeting people . talking to people . . and listening . . yeah . . supporting each other, my friends, we all

seem to got problems and supporting each other [Yeah] just listening, listening to each other. Yeah."

Support then, for Margaret, was about friends listening to one-another and sharing their problems. Figure 6.11 shows Margaret's response to thinking about the support she would want in the future.

Figure 6.11: Margaret, group 2, week 3

About figure 6.11, Margaret stated:

"I seem to have used, used pictures of sofas . cosiness [Mm, mm] Erm, but the main heading is (indistinct) think of a perm, er, 'style a new you every day', and that's what I would like to do. Every day just get stronger and stronger. And in the middle I've got 'Got a Lot of Living to Do'. Just sitting, half lying on a sofa . on the phone to people. And that's what I'd like to do [Yeah]. A little cosy fire. And just prettiness. Just see pretty things [Mm]. [So how does that, erm, differ from the support now then?] . . . . erm [If you said support in

> *the now is about meeting people] yes . just see pretty things and support in a way [Yeah], erm, be cosy [Yeah] it's all . chatting to friends, it's everything."*

Here then is not only the theme of domestic comfort that was very important to Margaret, and the sense of self-determination that meant a great deal to her, but also the importance of her relationship with friends and just being able to chat with them. Several times during the conversations that took place between women whilst making images support from friends was identified as being an important component of their support networks, with Anne, Carol and Emma making reference to the support gained from friends. This reference did not manifest itself directly within the images made, apart from where Anne (figure 5.8) placed a group of figures, that she referred to as both friends and as angels, centrally within the image. A more explicit reference to the role of friends, and of support gained from other women appears in another of Anne's images. Figure 6.12 shows her exploration of how she thought about support in the future, although it also incorporates her perception of support in the past and the present. In conversation Anne had said how she gained much from Women's Aid, attendance on the Freedom Programme, and the communal support gained from other women, with family and friends sometimes being perceived as supportive and at other times as not so supportive. This corroborates other research that shows how support from friends is often the first form of support sought (Kaukinen, Meyers & Akers, 2012), whilst such support received is not always helpful or is lacking (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Anne had the following to say about figure 6.12 at the end of her participation:

> *"I've done a lot of walls and lots of hands (laugh)[Yeah] . Which the hands I think is, is, is the feeling safe that . I felt so alone before, erm, I don't so much feel that now [Mm] although nothing's changed in that respect cos I go home from here it's, it's no different . I, I, I just don't feel as alone. Whether that's me just . . . accepting [Mm] who I am and accepting the situation but now I know that I can come here and I can talk [Mm] and, and there's someone to listen [Yeah]. Yeah? [So the hands are representing that?] Yeah."*

The mere fact of her participation in the research and the sense of being heard was, for Anne, part of a wider sense of support gained from being with other people who were able to listen. Being listened to and being witnessed appeared to contribute to her sense of acceptance of the point she was at in her life.

Figure 6.12: Anne, group 1, week 3

Figure 6.12 is interesting here not only because it is referring to the support gained through being heard by others but because it is also referring to the idea of home. In this instance home for Anne was being represented as a place of safety. The appearance of the walls within this image resonates with an earlier image (figure 5.1) that Anne had made where walls also made appearance, and about which she said:

> *"I have been through so much in me life . erm . everything I've come up against is like a barrier [Yeah] and I think the walls represent a barrier . erm . . and, and I can't get over them . [Mm] and . and I run into 'em, I try to knock 'em down. I try and, I try a-, I don't, it's not that I don't try to, to, to knock 'em down . it, it's . . perhaps in the past from being . a . a young child I've learnt to put them walls there . So . In my adult life . . it's about learning to take them walls down [Yeah] and, and . . allowing meself to be Anne [Mm]."*

The walls that appear in Anne's images then are, for her, about barriers that have been placed in her way but also it seems about barriers she has created as a protection: she referred to anger at one point as being one way in which she managed her frustrations along with a tendency to shut herself away from other people. In one very moving testimony Anne spoke about what the hand was representing, saying that:

> "And the hands represent . . help [Yeah] I suppose [Mm]. The need . to have help. The need to have . ev, everybody . needs human contact. I don't care who you are but everyone needs human contact. It's not natural not to have human contact and for a human being not to have human contact it's very unnatural. erm . from medically and everything."

Combining the image of a hand with that of walls was then showing something of the power of asking for and receiving help and support as a way of overcoming or removing barriers; barriers that were getting in the way of Anne feeling safe and feeling connected to other people.
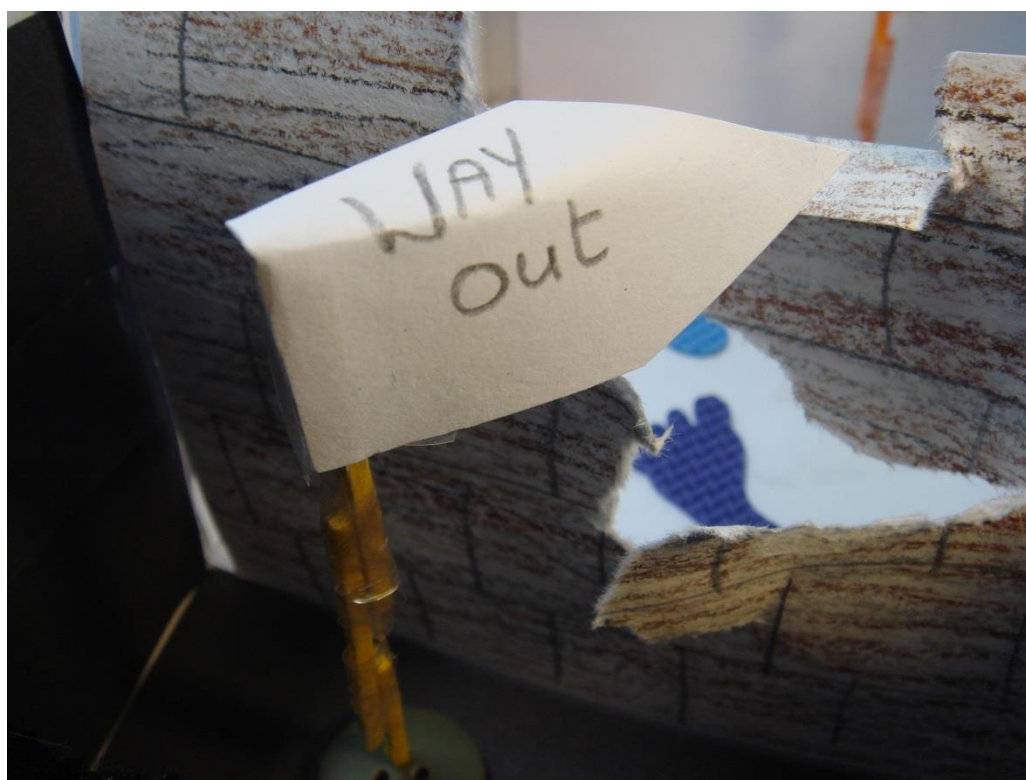
Figure 6.13: Pilot study image

The metaphor of walls was also important for one of the participants of the pilot study, where she was exploring the transition between her present and her future (figure 6.13). This is a simple yet powerful representation of the ability to perceive the future and the substantial, yet not insurmountable, barriers that exist between that present and the future. I will return to this image, but include it here to illustrate links between participants in how they had used the metaphor of walls to show something about barriers and the overcoming of those barriers.

Going back to Anne's images and her exploration of support, the hand that makes an appearance in figure 6.12, and that appears to be the force that is helping to remove those barriers, reappeared in figure 6.14 where she was thinking about the kinds of qualities she equates with safety and security.

Figure 6.14: Anne, group 1, week 5

I found this is one of the most powerful images made by anyone in the groups for various reasons: the clashing contrast of black and red; the word "Love", in being reversed almost reading as "Evil" or the beginning of the word "Evolve"; the bold patches of colour; and the hand with words that denote security for Anne. All of these add up to a strong and forceful image. Anne did not speak directly about this image apart from to say that it was about what she wanted to be and so it would seem to be focused upon the future. It is possible though to

piece together an expanded meaning based upon what she had spoken about elsewhere. The hand denotes safety and security and she had said this directly when talking about what the hand in figure 6.12 denoted. The use of the word love and its reversal is not referred to elsewhere but I get a sense of ambivalence and of uncertainty: how love can turn and change, and this seems linked to what Anne recalled about her childhood and life as an adult. Sometimes she had said that her childhood home was safe, whilst at other times she spoke as if it were not safe. In a similar way, when Anne spoke about her ex-partner and current partner (it seemed unclear at points who was who), they were presented as both a support and as a problem to her. The image then, seems to reflect something of this ambivalence and lack of a clear division between what is experienced as good, and what is experienced as bad. The image is ambiguous in that it can be read in different ways: for example the way words can be read in different ways, or the way that the clash of red and black might denote different people or times. This image did primarily, for me, embody Anne and all that she had shared about her past, present and future: a strong desire for safety and security, but knowing there has always been, and might always be, a possibility of that not being the case, and of love turning against her. The image is evocative, intense and very direct. My original notes show that Anne said little about the image and it is unclear how much she contributed to the discussion in the group during the meeting. Anne could at times be angry or withdrawn during her participation and this image reflects something of that anger. This for me then is a tough but essential image and along with the "Way Out" image (figure 6.13) that appeared in the pilot group, could stand in for a lot of other images made by other participants in the way that it explores how a sense of safety and support is strongly dependent upon the quality of relationships had with others along with the delicate and uncertain barrier between being safe and unsafe or between feeling loved and unloved. The helping hand in Anne's image signifies peace, health, love, safety and happiness; all of which add up-to a sense of security. Like other women in the research these things could be discovered internally but were more closely related to external factors and relationships. It was when relationships were able to provide that security that barriers and walls could be challenged and dismantled.

There were though those relationships which meant that such barriers could not be dismantled, and might even end up contributing to their growth. Violent and controlling partners or extended family obviously did this, but for a number of the women in the research, those agencies meant to assist were also at times experienced as contributing to the women's sense of not being in control. And whilst on many occasions the help and support received by Women's Aid was perceived in a positive way, the positive support received

from Social Services was perceived as minimal with the overwhelming feeling being that Social Services provided a service that was opaque, frustrating to communicate with, and blaming of the women. Where Social Services had been involved in the removal of children there was a great deal of anger expressed about the barriers that were put in the way of women regaining access; although more specifically it was about the lack of good communication with Social Services that caused most of the anger, so that those women who were trying to re-gain access felt left in a state of limbo and lacking control over the situation[16].

From a methodological point of view, the intriguing thing about this expression of anger and frustration at Social Services is that it did not manifest itself directly within the images and did not appear within the final interviews; instead it only appeared within the conversations that took place between the women as they made their images. An interpretation of this is that it perhaps felt too risky to express these views visually or verbally in ways that meant they would be preserved. In the way that many of the women spoke it certainly seemed that the relationship they had with Social Services was one in which the power to make decisions lay very much with Social Services, and therefore to be seen publicly to be critical of an organization that had so much influence over their lives and family was a risky thing to do. The choice to keep that criticism private was one that was made in response to the power imbalance that existed between the women and Social Services. There was potentially a similar process occurring when women spoke critically of the police or of the legal system, but primarily their anger and frustration was directed at Social Services.

Such criticisms of Social Services and their relationship with women who have experienced domestic violence are not wholly unique. Hague *et al* (2001) observed criticisms in their examination of women's perspectives upon inter-agency responses to domestic violence, whilst Abrahams (2010) recounts one of her interviewees experiencing something similar to Carol and Anne in terms of feeling that Social Services, along with other agencies, were very critical of her. This though is countered by another of Abrahams' interviewees saying that their view of Social Services had changed to one that was more positive when her situation had improved. Allen (2012) usefully corroborates this pattern where she explores how, for some women, their response to the interventions of Social Workers and other agents may take the form of resistance that reflects the relationships they are having, or have had,

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[16] It is important to note here that under the Children Act 1989 (HMSO, 1989) Social Services are legally obliged to make the welfare and safety of children paramount within any decisions made relating to families.

with abusive partners and family. In such cases, Allen suggests 'that the woman may respond to them as she is responding to the abusive behaviour itself – this is in a manner which is contingent with her self-identity' (p.89). Allen argues that with narratives of resistance forming such a key feature of abused women's identity it is easy for Social Workers to be met with resistance where they do not take the time to listen to women in a way that is non-judgemental and supportive. Allen's (2012) thesis is that Social Workers, alongside other professionals, be well-versed in the skills of counselling, and in particular a constructivist and narrative approach to counselling, so as to better listen and empathize with those women who have experienced domestic violence. The difficulty, as Allen points out, is that there is frequently a conflict of interest between balancing the very real and urgent needs of child protection with the needs of the woman, and Allen makes reference to other literature to support this observation (Holt, 2003 cited in Allen, 2012; Humphreys, 2000 cited in Allen, 2012). With frequent high-profile cases of abused children failing to be assisted not only by Social Services but the police, health professionals and teachers, it is perhaps unsurprising that the emphasis is going to be placed upon the welfare of children. In response to this need to protect women and children, Allen suggests that in such cases separate Social Workers be assigned to the woman and to any children. Such a move would assist the kind of care that Mullender *et al* (2002) argue children who have witnessed domestic violence deserve, whilst providing the woman with the compassionate support that she requires. Of course such an approach has huge cost implications and its adoption is going to be limited at this time. It is though a suggestion that was made by Carol herself when ruminating upon the fractious relationship she had with her assigned Social Worker. Whilst separate Social Workers for women and children may be a hard policy to enact, at the very least it seems Social Workers should be well trained in the needs of both women and children who are experiencing domestic violence, and this was suggested some time ago by the WNC (2003). How recent changes to the delivery of integrated health and social care within England and Wales (HMSO 2012c) impacts upon this need is yet to be quantified.

What the participants of the research revealed, in their conversations at least, is that they do feel let down and not adequately listened to by many of the services they come into contact with. Where adequate support is gained this was felt to come primarily from friends and from services such as Women's Aid. As well resonating with what Abrahams (2010), Allen (2012) and the WNC (2003) encountered in their research, such responses also resonate with those various reports cited in Chapter 2 that quantified how women judged those services they encountered in terms of consultation and involvement in decision-making

(Home Office 2009a; Hester & Westmarland, 2005; Home Office, 2005b). As those later reports indicate, the problems of not being consulted or listened to are frequently a feature of multi-agency interventions where different systems and processes often struggle to work together. Initiatives such as the formation of Family Justice Centres might be shown in future to be a useful way of addressing this fragmentation of services. Conversely, the value found by women in an agency such as Women's Aid may be very much to do with its relatively small size and its concerted focus upon the issue of domestic violence.

Figure 6.15: Lorraine, group 3, week 7

The importance for the women who took part in the research to feel that they had been seen, heard and supported by those services they came into contact with carried over into a how they felt about being supported within the research. This is best displayed by several images made by Lorraine. The first has already been shown (figure 5.2) where Lorraine explored her sense of sadness in a way that allowed it to be seen by the rest of us in the group. The eye that she placed very centrally within that image acts as a very literal sign for the act of seeing and being seen, and this use of an eye to connect to the viewer was repeated twice more by Lorraine. It appeared again in figure 6.15, and Lorraine spoke about this image being to do with the *"Eye of the beholder"*, stating that it showed how she was thinking about herself

now; something that she had been unable to do in the past. She later said that she was calm when making this image and that it helped her to sort out her thinking about problems she was having at the time. She also stated that it showed the outline of a fish that was swimming away from it all. Lorraine was thus making use of the metaphor of nature to represent escape and freedom, and as we have seen, this was a common metaphor used by many of the participants. This image I found calming in its use of pastel blues, greens and pinks, and found it a particularly emotive image. It picks up upon the theme Lorraine had introduced early about being seen by the group, but is here more controlled in terms of being calmer and more serene. As such, this image is an embodiment of Lorraine's growing confidence and sense of self, and this meant for her an ability to both see clearly and to be clearly seen. This theme carries into the later image (figure 6.16) that shows a female figure winking at the viewer, and here that would seem to have included myself as the male researcher.

Figure 6.16: Lorraine, group 3, week 9

About figure 6.16, Lorraine stated that it was a representation of a queen and that it was about gaining control and respect. It was also, she said, about new beginnings, and about how her

work with Women's Aid had helped her to gain new goals and strategies. She did not elaborate upon those goals and strategies but what is evident is that they had enhanced her confidence in a way that allowed her to engage with others in a more assertive way. Some of this discussion about being seen will be revisited in Chapters 7 and 9, where I more fully explore the value of acceptance and of being witnessed for those women who took part in the research, but here it helps to think about how what was considered useful support was that which involved being seen and heard clearly, whether that be by services, friends, family, or other women who had experienced similar things to themselves.

6.4 Summary

The focus of this chapter has been upon the nature of the women's relationships and how those relationships contributed to their sense of support or lack thereof, and of how relationships impacted upon how they thought about their present and future selves. For some women this was closely associated with their identity as mothers. The need for supportive relationships to be established has been shown to be as important for the women who took part in this research as it is for those women who have contributed to other research (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2010, 2007). A key component of what a good supportive relationship was considered to be by the participants is the feeling of being seen and heard, and this relates well to other literature that highlights the importance of this within service provision (Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2003). The conclusion to be drawn is that where the women who took part in the research felt supported and understood they were better able to draw upon their own resources and make those changes that they deemed necessary.

Elsewhere, the concern shown about re-uniting with children fits with what Frohmann (2005) found when using photography to explore a sense of safety; within which the idea of the fractured concept of the good family emerged within representations of safe spaces. As one of the participants of Frohmann's research said: '[a]lthough I am with my children, I feel that it is empty because there is no family harmony, which I think is the most important thing' (p.1407). This sense of harmony, linked to a sense of family and to a physical space, is something that would seem to have been in play for some of the women in my own research, whilst the link between harmony and the physical home that emerged very strongly in the previous chapter can be applied to the ways in which the women with children thought about the relationships they had with their children. The uniqueness of what emerged within this

research is how strongly related to each other the physicality of the home and the idea of family are for women who have experienced domestic violence. In this way it is similar to the way in which the physicality of the home provided women with a sense of escape and comfort. As such, the work of Cohen and Taylor (1992), and their notion of escape attempts as a way of managing dissatisfaction with the paramount reality of one's life in the present moment, can be applied as much to how women thought about their future families as to their thoughts of their future homes.

Similarly, just as Cohen and Taylor's (1992) use of social scripts was helpful in the previous chapter, so it is in this chapter. The search for family harmony can be considered to be framed by those social scripts that place a high value upon the connection between women, family and home (Bradley, 2013; Pink, 2012, 2004; Dryden, 1999), and there is a sense in which the women were working hard to consider themselves good mothers, whilst being acutely aware of how, as Anne suggested, it is mothers who tend to be blamed for what happens to their children. That sense of blame was mostly associated with how the women felt treated by Social Services, but it is just as easy to imagine that sense of blame emerging from the way in which family, friends, and even popular culture, commented upon the women's parenting choices. The findings show that experiences of domestic violence magnify the pressure upon women to be good parents. What this research also shows is how determined women are to continue working towards that idea, even where it means experiencing a great deal of anguish and uncertainty.

The images and words created by the women showed that at certain points their experience of time became problematic in the sense of there being an uncertainty as to when things might be different. This uneasy relationship with time leads to some further consideration of that idea of becoming and returning that has been touched upon in this chapter. It was suggested in the previous chapter that thoughts about the future home might be closely related to how home was experienced in the past, with the added proviso that the home of the past might be imagined rather than accurately remembered, so that thoughts about the future might be an unstable mixture of memory and imagination. Philosophical ideas developed by Brison (2002) were introduced to help frame these ideas about the physical home, and I believe that they can be equally applied to how the women were thinking through their ideas about family and children. Brison discusses prememories and postmemories in terms of the socialisation of the fear of rape, but it is just as possible to consider how there might be prememories and postmemories of joy, of pleasure or of harmony. I believe that in the stories that women where telling within this research there was

evidence to show that thoughts about the future family were contingent upon thoughts about the family of their own past and upon the social narrative of the good family. And it was whilst exploring thoughts about children and family that I most strongly gained the sense that becoming and returning were very closely related for some of the women. As shown by Anne and Carol, where they used the words *"Come Home"* and *"Welcome Home"* respectively*,* there was a very strong desire for a return to a former state. For Jane however there was less of a sense of return and stronger emphasise upon becoming something new; which in her case was an independent and self-determining woman, who also happened to be a mother. For Jane, that sense of becoming was driven by her wish to create a home and style of parenting that was oppositional and resistant to what she felt had been imposed upon her by her ex-partner and his family.

Continuing with Brison's (2002) work reveals that she advocates for an idea that violence disrupts the self in a way that means the self of the past, the present and the future becomes fragmented and shattered. Brison refers to the idea of the relational self; an idea that proposes that for anyone the concept of a unitary self is an illusion. Following traumatic events, such as domestic violence, that unity is challenged further and Brison asks 'how does one remake a self from the scattered shards of disrupted memory?' (p.49). For Brison this question is answered primarily through reference to the use of self-narratives, story-telling and empathic witnessing. I believe that all of those women who took part in this research demonstrated this process. Each of them, in their words and images, demonstrated how 'the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathic others' (p.38). The images show that women were at times struggling with the idea of who they were as independent women, but also who they were as mothers, or friends, or members of a family; with those aspects of self stretching backwards and forwards in time. This sense of the fragmentation and unification of the self being related to the flow of time can be related to the sense in which Villa (2011), in her consideration of intersectionality, considers identity to be a process of becoming rather than of being. Villa holds that the intersecting components of identity include not just gender, ethnicity and class, but also sexuality, health, disability and so on. Identity and power are for Villa complex and dynamic process that shift and morph as the person passes through life. We see in some of the women's stories how their sense of identity was consequence of intersecting factors and forces, and that these dynamic intersections affected their sense of power and agency. For example, Carol exercised power over her home in order to make space for her children but felt less autonomy when it came to

her relations with Social Services. Jane, like Carol, was exercising power within the home, but felt under some influence from her ex-partner's family. There was then, for Carol, Jane and the other women in the research a sense of wanting to become more independent, or to become part of a harmonious family, in a way that made that dynamic process of becoming a willed and conscious one. What is also revealed is that the idea of what they would like to become is in some sense based upon a desire to return to what they have had in the past; not completely, but enough to say that how women who have experienced domestic violence construct their vision of the future will be informed by how they remember their pasts.

Brison (2002) clearly indicates that within a model of the self as relationally situated, any sense of a harmonious self – especially one that has been made vulnerable through violence - is contingent upon the empathy of other people. Such a view fits with what is stated elsewhere when considering how people, following experiences of illness or trauma, recover a sense of agency and meaning through the processes of testimony, storytelling and witnessing (Radley, 2009; Wilkinson, 2004; Frank, 1996; Kleinmann 1989). How the women told their stories of feeling understood by some but not by others, and the subsequent impact upon their sense of agency and wellbeing, provides evidence of this philosophy. The next chapter continues this theme by considering in greater detail how the women explored their sense of agency and resistance.

7 : Agency and Resistance

7.1 Introduction

Whilst Chapter 5 was concerned with how the participants were managing their lives in the present and how they imagined their lives in the future, and Chapter 6 was focused upon the way in which those plans and desires were aided and frustrated through various types of relationships, this chapter pays closer attention to the internal thought processes and narratives that women employed when presenting stories about their transition away from domestic violence. This includes the way in which they spoke about, and made images of, the process of making decisions, and the ways in which they managed their thoughts about how domestic violence had impacted upon their perceptions of self, their relationships and their plans for the future. Ideas about agency and resistance have been referenced in the foregoing presentation of data; here they are presented in greater detail. In paying attention to the way in which women narrated their internal thought processes, and perceptions of self, the focus in the earlier part of this chapter shifts towards a slightly more psychological reading of the women's stories when compared to previous discussions.

Consideration of the internal processes involved within the stories told by women about their transitions away from domestic violence begins with attention to how the decision making process was represented and how this fed into management of thoughts about the past as they impinged upon negotiating the present and planning for the future. This will be followed by a consideration of the mental acts of acknowledgment and acceptance and of how the women related to their own stories. Those stories were told through words and images, and the way in which words and images became fused together on the page or object and of how that points towards the need to be seen and heard forms part of the discussion that takes place within this chapter. The chapter closes by proposing that the agency and resistance exhibited by the women was both a personal and collective response to experiences of domestic violence, and that agency can be both active and passive.

7.2 Decision making and agency

A powerful metaphor that emerged within the pilot study was that of a tightrope-walker, enacted by the Playback theatre actors (Baird & Salmon, 2012; Rowe, 2007) as they responded to one participant's story of walking a fine line between making right and wrong

decisions. For one of the women in the pilot group this meant decisions made about whether to leave her children behind or take them with her when she left her violent husband. For another it was about decisions that she would have to make concerning her future employment and her desire for financial independence. Whilst not being a precise fit, this use of the metaphor of a tightrope-walker has parallels to the way in which McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2011) use the exact same metaphor to describe how women who have been raped attempt to make sense of, and talk about, what has happened, in a way that honours their own unique experiences, whilst conforming to legally and medically accepted narratives about rape. For McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance, precariousness and doubt emerge in the telling of stories of violence; for the women in this research, they emerge in how they make decisions in response to violence. What the tightrope metaphor allows for is an appreciation of how the experience of doubt and uncertainty might physically and psychologically feel like. It is a powerful embodiment of a complex set of emotions that can leave women feeling in a precarious and vulnerable position; and as indicated in the previous chapter, where those decisions will have an impact upon a mother's relationship with her children, these feelings are heightened further. The stories and incidents that women told and had played back to them centred on the balance between doubt and hope: doubts about decisions made in the past; doubts about decisions made now and the anxiety of having to make decisions in the future; and the desire to not make decisions because of the physical anxiety that it provokes. It was stated quite clearly that by its very nature an abusive relationship took away the women's trust in their own abilities to make decisions, even where hope for a better future was in existence.

The main phase of the research saw the appearance of similar feelings about the decision making process come together in one key image that was produced by Emma during the end of her participation (figure 7.1). This image was the culmination of many weeks of preparatory work; with Emma developing her ideas both in the group and away from it. Her on-going training in artistic skills aided her in the making of the image, and as a consequence it has an aesthetic sophistication that gives it extra significance in terms of viewer engagement. In her conversations about this image Emma spoke about how it represented the choices that she was faced with and the anxiety that accompanied that need to make a decision. It was also an image that explored her acceptance of what had happened to her in the past, acknowledging the anger she faced and her ability to survive a violent partner. Running up through the centre of the image is the representation of a cross-roads sign that asks the question *"Which way?"* On the left-hand side of the image is the appearance of those

things Emma associated with her ex-partner that she had explored in other images earlier in her participation: shouting, swearing, anger, coldness, and cruelty. On the right-hand side are representations and words that show Emma's sense of survival and of how she had been affected by living with domestic violence, so that we see and read something about being battered, bruised, and *"Driving off the edge",* as well as being shown a representation of how Emma was *"still standing".* Dancing, music, art, sunshine and a *"lucky white feather"* contribute to that aspect of the image. Read in an anti-clockwise direction from the top-left of the image around to the top-right, the image can be seen to represent the journey that Emma had taken as she moved away from a violent partner. In one area of the image, towards the lower and central area is found representations of how Emma came to realise that she could not live with violence any longer; the words *"Tip of the iceburg"*(sic) and *"Being pushed too far"* repeat what Emma had previously explored in some of her earlier images. Figure 5.1 for example explored her being positioned somewhere between darkness and light, aware of her predicament and using song lyrics to express how she had needed to hold onto a sense of agency and self-belief in order to resist and survive.

Agency is an important concept to explore further at this point. Within domestic violence literature it has a particular meaning. It is a key component of Kelly's (1988) differentiation between the label of victim and survivor and is introduced by Lempert (1996) as the way in which women form 'distinctive internal definitions of self and situation and to develop problem solving and coping strategies to resolve the conflicts and to end the violence' (p.286). Agency can be both active and passive and can be considered to be in evidence where 'women [use] conscious decision making to take action, not only active behaviours (e.g., calling the police) but other actions that would be defined as passive (e.g., subordinating the self) in most theoretical schemas' (Campbell *et al* 1998, p.758). It is thus a term that gives value to any action a woman might take in response to domestic violence that is conscious and aims to keep them safe. With its inclusion of passivity as a conscious management strategy it challenges social definitions of the passive victim of domestic violence. Whilst there was little in the way of women recounting how they moderated their partner's behaviour - with much of the agency that emerged within women's narratives referring to actions taken after leaving – an action like Emma's use of song lyrics shows how simple acts were used to gain a sense of self-expression when living with domestic violence and after leaving. Thought about in this way, agency shares some of the qualities identified earlier when thinking about the escape attempts (Cohen & Taylor, 1992) employed by women in terms of the way in which agency can include thoughts and actions that allow

women the possibility of imagining a different future. For Emma, the song lyrics and what they communicated about survival had this quality.

Figure 7.1: Emma, group 3, week 12

What figure 7.1 clearly shows is how Emma, despite now living away from a violent partner and home, had to work hard on maintaining her sense of having made the right decision in choosing to leave when she did. Emma was exploring the delicate balance between going forwards with a sense of optimism and returning to a former state of fear. But that choice, presented as it is here, is not so much about choosing between staying away from a violent partner and returning to them, but more to do with uncertain feelings about the future: will it be a *"Rough and bumpy road"* or a *"Smooth road"*? Emma's image is a very complete image in the sense that it shows different aspects of a lengthy and on-going journey, incorporating thoughts and feelings about the past, the present and the future. Whilst there is uncertainty, there are also signs of optimism, represented by signs of pleasure and joy. These include music, dancing and art. The image is thus one that encapsulates a complete, although unfinished, journey away from domestic violence. Its attention to the uncertainty that surrounds making decisions is one that corroborates what Abrahams (2010) observed within the narratives of women who had been controlled to such an extent that the making of any decision after leaving a controlling and violent partner was accompanied by both fear and anxiety, and fits within the view of domestic violence being one of power and control (Shepard & Pence, 1999) that continues to have a strong influence upon contemporary interventions in response to domestic violence (Barner & Carney, 2011). Figure 7.1, like the image of the tightrope walker, also exhibits the kind of ambivalence that has been identified elsewhere (Campbell *et al*, 1998) as appearing within women's thoughts about what might happen in the future when contemplating and planning to leave a violent relationship.

A similar representation of the journey away from domestic violence, and of how it involves reflections upon decision making, appears in an image created by Carol (figure 7.2). This image was rich in meaning for Carol but is primarily representative of her movement through time, with the left side of the image representing the past, whilst the centre and right of the image point towards the present and the future. Carol spoke extensively about this image. To begin with she stated that:

> *". . . this one I must say I think is the first time I opened up to anything . deep inside really [Yeah] in my mind and my heart. I've done like brick walls [Mm] which are in the corners and I'm just like, you know, let 'em down, let 'em down, get rid of them. I don't need 'em there no more. [Is that like barriers then?] Yeah, they were barriers. They're still there /[Yeah]/ In each direction I go they're still there /[Yeah]/ but they're getting smaller [Yeah]. They're*

> *getting more manageable where I can just kick 'em down but they then rebuild*
> *back up to that point, they don't go any further cos I won't allow 'em to [No]."*

Figure 7.2: Carol, group 1, week 6[17]

The reference to brick walls, and the resistance against them, has been commented upon already where they appear elsewhere (figures 6.13 & 6.14). Like those previous examples, the walls within Carole's image are representative of both internal processes of self-protection and external barriers placed in the way of the achievement of hopes and desires, along with the recognition that they can now be challenged or pushed to the margins. Carol is indicating how her participation in the research was helping her to express more fully her thoughts and feelings, and that this expression was in itself a contributing factor within that resistance. What is significant for the discussion here is how Carol represented her experience of the past and her sense of not having known in which direction to go in. Carol revealed how difficult her past had been for her. In particular this included her having to say goodbye to her

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[17] Image edited to maintain anonymity

children; the anguish of which has already been expressed in the previous chapter. Talking about the part of the image that represents the past, Carol said the following:

> *"Erm, there's a lot of black, grey and blue; which symbolises darkness of how my mind is, or part of my mind, you know. It's me past. It were really dark and scary and I didn't know what I were going, which way I were going; which represents the signpost. I didn't know where I were going; what way to go is the right way - the wrong way? Er, bye . saying bye to me kids. I didn't want to say bye. That's why it's so bold as it is. [Mm]. Cross is hospital all the time, and yeah, I've been again. Er no. Which is also me saying bye. I don't wanna say no, so that's written down there. And I've got a dead end [Mm], which I've done it the wrong way round with colours, but I don't know why. But erm . yeah, whichever way I went it were a dead end."*

Like Emma, Carol was saying how difficult it had felt to make decisions in the past, and like Emma, she had made use of the symbol and the metaphor of the signpost to represent the uncertainty about decisions made. Unlike Emma though, Carol had a more optimistic vision of the future. Talking about the central part of the image, with purple curtains revealing a blue sky beyond, Carol stated that:

> *" . . . the past few months . things are starting to look up [Yeah]. But you know there is a life out there. Family. That's better than what [Mm] it was."*

What is illuminating about this image is how the future is framed both literally and figuratively in such a way that it can be hidden or revealed. During the making of this image Carol and the other women present spoke about not always being able to see clearly, and of having a sense of being lied to, and of not being able to understand what had happened to them that left them feeling confused. This confusion was not only about the violence and abuse that they had encountered; it was, for those women with children, also about those actions and decisions made for them by Social Services and family courts that they felt they had no control of. This sense of not always having control of the decisions made by Social Services about their children's futures repeats similar narratives observed by other researchers (Allen, 2012; Home Office, 2009a; WNC, 2003) and contributes further to the discussion begun in the previous chapter where encounters with Social Services were

frequently experienced as being barriers to women's attainment of better futures for themselves.
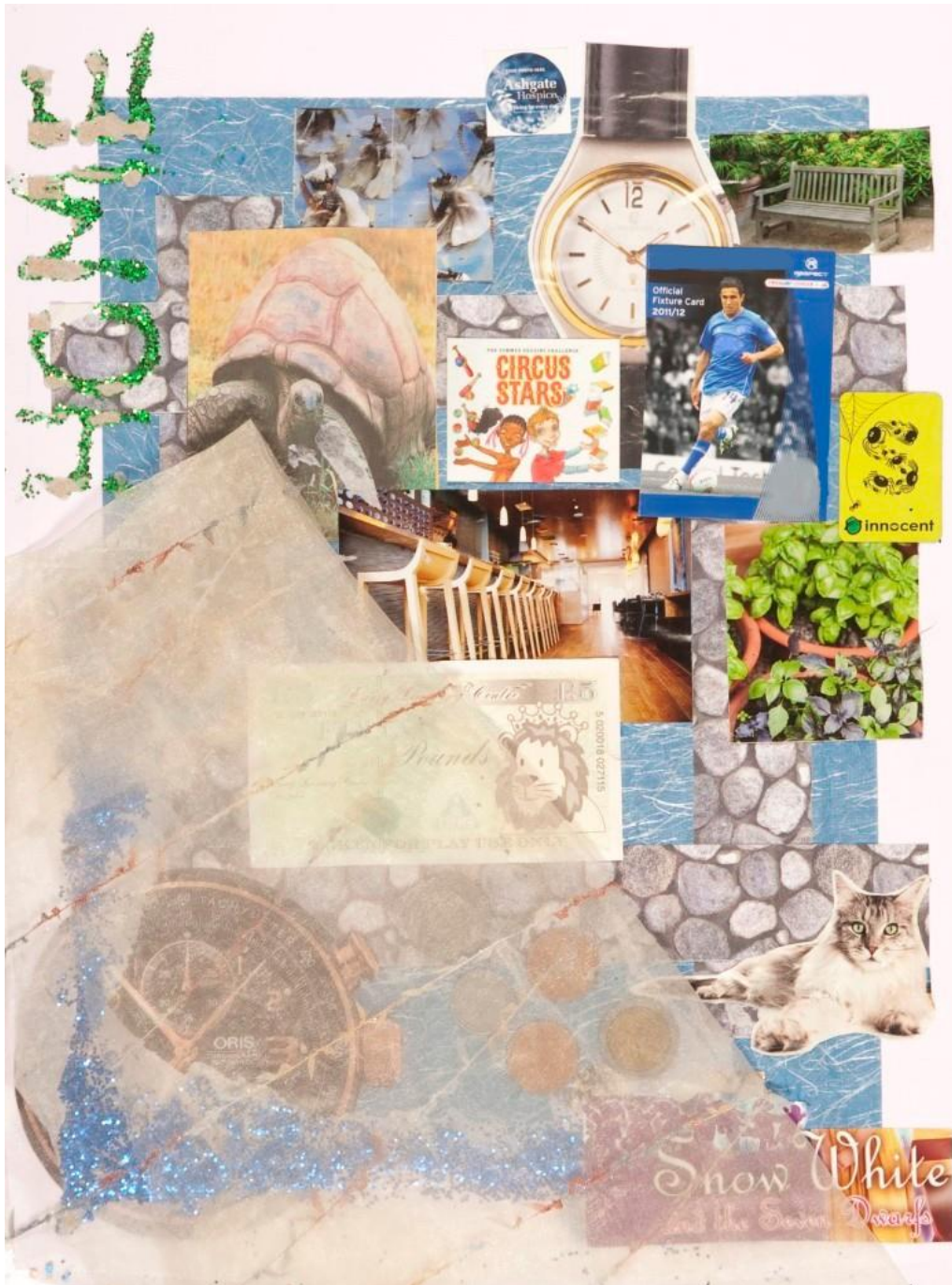
Uncertainty about the past, and the accompanying management and containment of those thoughts about the past, are continued within an image made by Jane (figure 7.3) that was produced during the same week that Carol made figure 7.2. It shows how Jane was

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[18] Image edited to maintain anonymity

consciously choosing to hide certain aspects of her past. The focus for this image was primarily upon representations of home, with the upper half of the image showing those aspects of daily life that represented Jane's positive feelings about her new home and the relationship she had with her son: kitchen, garden, pets and football for example. The bottom left though shows how Jane used a piece of semi-transparent material to represent how she was deliberately choosing to cover over those aspects of her past that were to do with feeling controlled by her ex-partners family, that are represented by bank notes, coins and stones. The watches in the bottom-left and the top-right resonated with how other women used images of clocks and watches to represent their relationship with time (figure 6.4 and 6.11), with both Carol and Jane speaking about the process of hiding and revealing the past, and of how their relationship with the past had altered so that they were now able to make changes in the present and in the future. The appearance of watches and clocks appears to be a shared metaphor for the existential and experiential experience of moving through time. This is a chronological metaphor, that when combined with the spatial metaphors of hiding and revealing exposes a 'coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.9). The overarching metaphorical concept that lies behind the representation of watches and clocks is that time and the flow of events is uncertain and not always fully within the women's control.

Together, figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 illustrate how the process of transitioning away from violent and controlling relationships is one that is fraught with anxiety, uncertainty and confusion, with the past feeling like an unclear and confusing place that spills over into how choices are made in the present. Such processes have been identified as being common responses to violently traumatic experiences in the way that they disrupt the sense of a coherent sense of self through time (Brison, 2002). The sense of confusion about the past, the present and the future, which is particularly evident here when thinking about decision making, aligns with Frank's (1995) understanding of chaos narratives, within which there is a lack of a coherent connection between the self through time. Whilst the women were able to tell their stories in a coherent way – something that Frank argues is not wholly possible within the moment of chaos because 'those who are truly *living* the chaos cannot tell in words' (p.98, original emphasis) – the elements of doubt and anxiety indicate that they struggled at points to feel in control of both their pasts and their futures. As well as this sense of uncertainty, what the women's stories also show are the attempts that were made to resist that uncertainty and the anxiety that accompanied it by mentally reframing, hiding and separating the past from the present and the future. That all of the women were able to show

something of their past in visual form, regardless of how stable or chaotic it felt, indicates that where words were not available, as Frank (1995) suggests is the case where the person is living in the moment with chaos, visual expression is possible and is able to communicate something of that chaos. Where the future was harder for some women to envision and imagine, I suggest that this is indicative of how some women were, as Abrahams (2010) observes, 'so traumatised by their experiences of abuse that, at that stage of their lives, they were unable to formulate any concept of the future' (p.18). All of the women who took part in the research were able to conceptualise the future, and the attendant decisions required to get them there, but some found it harder than others. For example Jane and Carol appeared to find this easier to do than Anne or Emma: a difference that may be a reflection of the varying amounts of time that had elapsed since leaving a violent relationship and environment.

What the images shown here also indicate is how the process of managing thoughts about the past are active, dynamic and layered, and that they can be extended forwards in time. They also show how there can be a conscious choice made as to how the past is allowed to shape the present and influence the future, so that the negative elements of the past can be actively resisted and a different, more hopeful future, actively imagined. What the proceeding chapters have shown is how resistance and imagination are aided by the self-determining acts associated with the management of physical space and relationships. What the images shown here suggest is that the transition away from domestic violence, and the attendant anxiety and doubt it generates, is also managed through the management of thoughts and images of the past, the present and the future.

A statement made by Jane in the week that she made the image that is shown in figure 5.4 encapsulates very well the coming together of these ideas about the management of both internal and external factors and the management of the self through time. In talking generally about how she was working on creating a different kind of home and set of relationships, Jane stated that *"I couldn't move forward if I didn't look back"*. The power and significance of Jane's words, within the context of the foregoing discussion, is that spatial (*"move forward"*) and visual (*"look back"*) metaphors come together in thoughts about the management of the self through time. Notions of linguistic metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and the re-construction of the self after violence (Brison, 2002) are thus brought together within Jane's statement. On the one hand, reference is being made to the physical elements of moving forwards in time, which can be taken as being representative of how the future was aligned so strongly to the physicality of home and place within many of the stories women constructed about their imagined futures. On the other hand, the reference to looking

backwards hints at the psychologically internal process of reviewing the past; a process that Jane suggests is essential to the making of a life in the future. In a somewhat similar way, Carol spoke at one point about being in a better place that allowed her to look backwards more clearly. The "better place" she referred to was not only physical but also emotional, and the ability to see the past more clearly was identified by Carol as a necessity if she was to regain access to her children. Taken together, Jane's and Carol's words about looking at the past in order to move forwards provide spoken evidence that complements the visual evidence in figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 about the interconnection between points in time within women's autobiographical stories and about their transition away from domestic violence.

7.3   Acceptance and resistance

Thoughts about autobiographical stories through time continued into how the women represented the ways in which they came to accept who they were, the experiences they had encountered, and the feelings it left them with. Towards the end of the previous chapter, two images by Lorraine (figures 6.16 & 6.17) were presented as being suggestive of the acceptance of who one was now and of what had been experienced in the past. Those images were also suggestive of the importance of being witnessed. In some respects all those women who took part in the research were engaged in those two processes of acceptance and witnessing. Here though, the focus is upon those images that articulated a sense of acceptance and acknowledgment, alongside those feelings of agency and determination that contributed to thoughts about resistance.

An image that explores well the themes of acceptance and acknowledgement is one produced by Lisa in figure 7.4. This image was the last one that Lisa made and it contains much of what she had been exploring throughout her participation: power, social justice and resistance to control. The image is almost exclusively word-based and is therefore somewhat different to most other images. Perhaps the most striking element about this image is the division of the page into two parts and it is possible to read this as referring to what might be rejected and what might be embraced, or of what is in the past and what is in the future. The words indicate that the themes of anger towards social injustice and the desire to make changes were very important to Lisa. There are also themes of resistance towards the way Lisa has been treated, and as such the image fits into the notion of resistance (Kelly, 2011; Campbell *et al*, 1998) as a response to the experience of domestic violence. For Lisa,

resistance is achieved through the strategy of an appeal to social justice and of thinking positively about herself.

Figure 7.4: Lisa, group 3, week 11

Lisa's commentary about this image included the following observation:

> *"And so I very much felt like a soldier soldiering on, not perhaps getting the help that I needed. Erm, I just felt all the time that, er, people wanted me to be a good little robot."*

This is a point that resonates with Jane's image (figure 6.3) that appeared to represent motherhood in a military way. But whereas Jane was referring to protecting her son from the hostile forces of her ex-partners family, Lisa was talking more generally about her experience of being expected to fit in and of this being like a battle or a war. Lisa articulated her sense of injustice and of having to conform in greater detail where she said the following:

> *". . . still this warriors battling and what have you. And it would be so nice to have a society that believed in honesty, erm, being the best policy that was built on trust, erm . I'm always trying to think forward but it's very difficult because*

> *I feel as though I've been socialised into . erm . a lot of societal norms that don't work, that are not appropriate anymore and things need to be changed and I don't like the fact that . in British history if things don't work . er . they will put that square, they will hammer that square peg in that round hole and just "Ergh!" make it into a hexagon, rather than just . scraping it and thinking "let's think of something new"."*

So whilst Lisa did make reference to how as a child she felt forced to conform, her commentary went much wider than this, suggesting that for her, British history as a whole is one of enforced conformity. The significance of this is that Lisa was making explicit links between her experiences of coercive control within the family – experienced as a child and as an adult – with social patterns of coercive control. From the perspective of a feminist critique of patriarchy, Lisa's comments are entirely in keeping with an idea that the family is a site of social control and conformity that does not lend itself to women's suffrage (Dryden, 1999). In this instance, acceptance is about acknowledging the existence of such forces whilst also being determined to resist and counter those forces through talking about them and attempting to continue on one's own direction. The direction chosen by Lisa involved a connection with religion and nature. At one point Lisa stated that:

> *"The fact that I'm religious as well, there's a religious icon there in the second er painting, but also as well as the bright and beautiful because I love nature, absolutely adore nature, and I think nature for me is a good way of er, escaping the harsh realities of life erm that mankind inflict on each other."*

We have seen nature employed by many of the women as a literal and symbolic form of escape from difficult domestic environments and the consequences of those environments upon the self; here Lisa is making use of nature as a response to social injustices. What is clear within Lisa's words and in her images is her determination to not be controlled, but to instead perceive herself as a winner. A similar determination is apparent within another of Emma's images (figure 7.5) that again incorporates her attachment to the lyrics of Bernie Taupin and Elton John (1989, 1983).
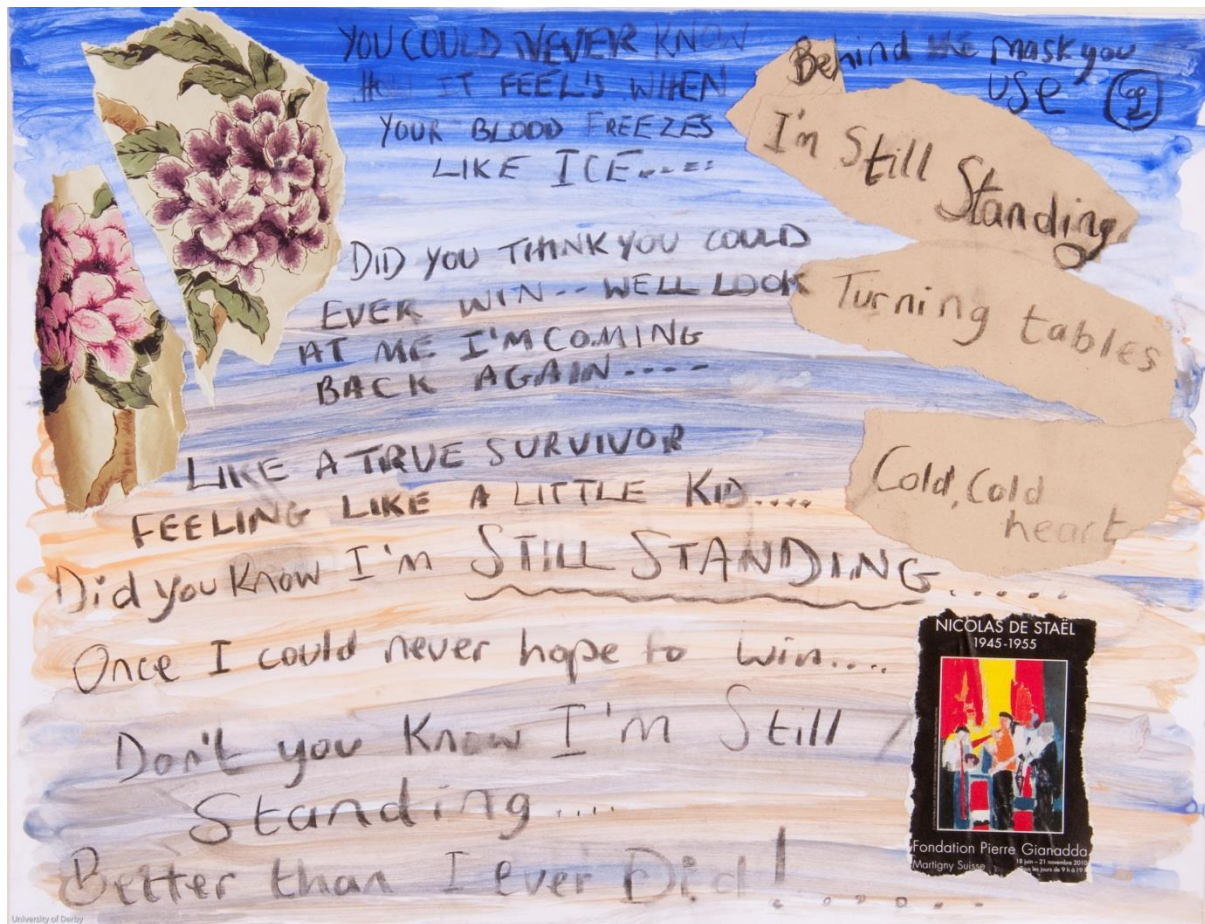
Figure 7.5: Emma, group 3, week 7

The lyrics speak for themselves and clearly convey how, despite the coldness and broken hearts, Emma was "still standing . . . like a true survivor". In a similar way to her other images, this image conveys Emma's use of nature and art, represented by the collaged elements in the corners of the image, as ways of managing her transition away from violence and control. In its representation of a determination to survive it fits well with those parts of her image that explored decision making and transition (figure 7.1) that look towards the future in an optimistic way. The acceptance of the reality of what has been experienced and the determination to carry on and to make things different is a strong component within the transition away from domestic violence displayed by the participants, with many stories representing an on-going process of attempting to manage thoughts and feelings about the past, the present and the future. In this way acceptance is both a form of reflective acknowledgment of what has been experienced but also a spur to agency. Further examples of this can be found in figure 6.16 and 6.17 made by Lorraine. Lorraine stated that figure 6.16 was about how she was able to think about herself again, and the eye can be read as signifying being able to see clearly what has happened, so that it becomes a witness that is able to accept the reality of domestic violence. The forcefulness of the stare within both

figure 6.16 and 6.17 also signifies a determination to be seen that shows a strong sense of agency in terms of seeking the support of others.

One last image I want to present at this point of the discussion was made by Carol towards the very end of her participation in the third group. Because Carol had attended two groups her total participation was greater than any of the other women who took part, and this image (figure 7.6) encapsulates her own journey away from domestic violence and embodies well the themes of transition, acceptance and agency. It also reflects her journey through participation in the research.

Figure 7.6: Carol, group 3, week 11

In her final evaluation Carol said the following about this image:

> ". in this one I've put more words into it, more meaningful . er . . . . it's like I've put like your, "If your betrayed, release disappointment at once, by that way the bitterness has no time to take root". Unfortunately I wish I'd had read that in the past, cos then maybe I wouldn't be so bitter about . things that are . going on now . erm . . . and that is quite a strong . like quote really [Yeah] .

> *Erm, and this one "I'm done getting hurt, I'm done getting treated less than I deserve. I'm done caring about something that doesn't even matter anymore." Yeah I am done with all that, I can't cope with anymore of that, but it's bought it all up. Which I do need it to come up to . release it [Mm] which it certainly ties in with that bitterness quote. . (indistinct). That's my happy place . where I wanna be . got that one there . well on the pathway [Yeah] . so I'm sort of like in the middle of it ."*

This image I found to be very forceful and direct; the left hand side of the image, with the word "Angry" scratched into the surface, shows real physical angst and illustrates something of Carol's acknowledgement of what she had experienced. As well as the quotations that Carol had cited in her evaluation above, there are also the following that appear within the image: "*He who has overcome his fears will truly be free"; "I will fear no more", "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom".* What all of these quotes indicate is that Carol had a determination to be free from the fear and anxiety that, for her, belonged to the past; although the way Carol spoke elsewhere suggested that the past was still very present for her and kept alive through the connection that existed between her children and her ex-partner. The balloons contain the words *"Happiness"* and *"Freedom"*, and the way in which those balloons are placed on the image suggests that they were important to Carol in her past as well as being important to her in the present and the future. The figure on the pathway resonates with other images that express a sense of being on a path between places. Carol is on that pathway, although still with a way to go. As Carol says, *"I'm sort of like in the middle of it".* Like many other images made by participants it is an image of a transition between points in time. In composition it shares a similar structure to that in figure 7.4, with the image divided in two parts to represent the past and the future. It is also, like many of the other images, an image of being somewhere between being confined and being free.

In her evaluation Carol mentions how this image was one that allowed her to express her thoughts and feelings in a way that she had not previously been able to do before within the research. As such, the pathway can also be read as being representative of her engagement with the research process. This reflexive response to her participation leads into thinking about how the research process became part of the journey and transition away from domestic violence; it is a theme I shall return to in Chapter 9.

7.4 Words as a form of acceptance and resistance

The images shown in the section above, and it is true of many other images presented throughout, rely greatly upon the written word to complement and reinforce the visual elements. This is worth considering in detail because one of the questions this research seeks to answer is to consider the relationship between words and images within arts-based research. The images presented allow an immediate example of how the two might exist on the page together. At first glance it might appear that the words are very descriptive and concrete: a sort of 'matter-of-fact writing, in which words are treated like objects and an object's function is more important than its appearance' (MacDougall, 2006, p.32). However, their placement and relationship to one-another elevates them to a form of writing that is closer to poetry in their emotional intensity. MacDougall (2006) sees the written word, especially academic writing, as struggling to capture the multisensory, nonverbal and interpersonal nature of speech, suggesting that whilst the written word is excellent at focusing upon details it is limited in terms of how it portrays different things simultaneously. MacDougall classifies much writing as being cumulative in the way that it presents facts and impressions in a sequential way, whilst visual images, especially moving images, are composite in their 'co-presentation' (p.49) of objects. This co-presentation means that '[p]hysical objects appear together and often jostle for space within a shot, sometimes isolated, sometimes interconnected, and sometimes over-lapping one another in foreground and background' (p.49). This co-presentation is an intrinsic element of visual images and is in evidence in all of the images produced in this research meaning that we receive all of the information at once, with the details emerging more slowly, over time. Where words are used, these too though exhibit a similar sense of co-presentation and simultaneously. They provide snippets of information and glimpses of fuller sentences. Where the words do form more complete phrases and sentences these are very often in the form of song lyrics (figure 7.5), meditative quotations (figure 7.6) or poems (figure 7.7). They thus have the quality of poetic representation rather than precise description, meaning that linguistic gaps and spaces are left to be filled by the imagination of the viewer.

A very explicit example of the poetic use of language, that is particularly pertinent to this chapter, is to be found in Figure 7.7 that shows a poem written by Lisa exploring her sense of entrapment, social injustice and the desire for freedom. These themes are similar to those that appeared in figure 7.4, except here Lisa draws upon the metaphor of nature as innocent and religious iconography to say something about the struggle to be free and to

"soar into the sky". The use of poetry in this way can, as MacDougall (2006) claims, allows for a nuanced and multi-sensory image to emerge through the written word and, following Mannay's (2013) use of poetry to express women's sense of violence and safety, can 'communicate the aesthetic and evocative qualities of both the stories shared and the impact of me the researcher' (p.134). What Lisa's poem communicates to me is a mixture of vulnerability and a determination to resist the restrictions imposed upon her.

Little Bird

I saw you struggling on your perch
You'd tumbled out t'nest
You flapped your weakly wings but
It did nought to test
And hopping and striving and faintly conniving to leap
Into the air
As gust of a breeze caused you to be teased
And continued to disturb your best efforts and dare
To fledge and to fly, to soar into the sky
Is your wanton wish
Yet the denizens of Hell pull and yank your bell and
Like gravity invisibly bind
Your poor body to the ground, where easily found
And predated by one of your kind
Your struggles and cheeps, your frustrated
Tries did fleet
Have left no trace of your existence
'Twas fortune who forwarded your demise
Witnessed by the Almighty's presence

Figure 7.7: Lisa, group 3, week 8[19]

The appearance of words within images can thus be interpreted as the participants wanting to make it very clear to the viewer precisely what it is they wanted to convey. With images offering a variety of readings there is the fear that misinterpretation is possible and it is

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[19] The original version of Lisa's poem was hand written by her. Due to the uniqueness of her handwriting the decision was taken to present the poem in typed form to avoid any potential breach of anonymity.

perhaps such a fear that leads to the use of words: a way of ensuring that the meaning is fixed and unambiguous. Such an interpretation of the use of words within images would fit with an understanding of the need to be witnessed within narratives and storytelling and of the desire to gain acceptance.

7.5   Summary

Both agency and resistance have been referred to frequently within this chapter to help frame the internal mechanism women employed to manage the thoughts about the transition away from domestic violence. Agency has been introduced as conscious action that is both active and passive and that keeps women safe (Campbell *et al*, 1998; Lempert, 1996), with the suggestion made that agency is as much a feature of life after domestic violence as it is when living with domestic violence. Resistance shares something of the qualities of agency in terms of how it can be considered as part of women's management of domestic violence. It does though differ in one crucial component and that is in the way that it can be conceptualised as a collective, as well as an individual, response to domination. This claim is made in light of a view of domination being 'ossified relations of power' (McLaren, 2004, p.220), and an understanding of power being non-subjective and 'relational, existing only between and among persons, institutions, discourses, practices and objects' (p.220). This view of power and domination, from a feminist perspective, can be applied to an understanding of patriarchy and gender violence; likewise, such an understanding means that it is only through collective resistance that freedom and liberation is possible. This is an understanding of resistance that challenges the view of domestic violence, its consequences upon women's health and wellbeing, and associated responses, as being only of concern to individuals and couples. Instead, it places that concern within the realm of the collective and the social. Such a view can be used to critique the language used to describe responses to domestic violence: whilst 'victim' and 'survivor' imply an individual response and level of accountability, resistance implies a collective and shared answer to domestic violence.

On one level, the responses given by the participants to thinking about domestic violence places their narratives within an understanding of domestic violence being of individual concern: the way in which the physical home or decision making was thought about would fit within such an understanding. Alternatively, those times when women represented their thoughts about relationships would fit with a collective model of domestic violence. Where Lisa made reference to social injustices and patriarchy there is a very clear

and explicit link to the collective model. Furthermore, where women were able to share and witness their stories with one another, this can be read as a collective response to domestic violence that acted as a form of resistance through challenging the isolation and individual accountability that experiences of domestic violence can impose upon the individual (Lempert, 1996).

The following chapter proposes an explanation that draws together the ideas and themes presented in this and the preceding two chapters.

8 : Transitional Stories of Domestic Violence

8.1 Introduction

The presentation of women's spoken and visual narratives has identified three major themes: the way in which the physical environment contributes to women's sense of freedom and harmony; the attempt to create a family and manage relationships and how support was sought and experienced during the pursuit of this idea; and the ways in which the women managed feelings around self-acceptance, self-belief and decision making within their journeys away from domestic violence and towards the kinds of homes, relationships and sense of well-being that they desired for themselves. These three themes have been labelled in the following way: escape and harmony; relationships and social support; and agency and resistance. This chapter draws together those themes to develop a complete picture that reveals what I refer to as *transitional stories of domestic violence.*

A transitional story of domestic violence is one that entails the representation of physical and emotional movement between places, movement through time, and changes in relationships. Together these transitions contribute to the changing ways in which women perceive themselves and engage in tactics of agency and resistance. There are elements of the story that contain acts of agency and control, and elements that highlight barriers to the achievement of goals and desired outcomes. A transitional story is one that encompasses the past, the present and the future. It is a story that acts as a bridge between points in time and allows imaginative movement between those points.

The discussion in this chapter starts by aligning the stories told to those discourses of domestic violence that were identified in Chapter 2, so as to ascertain the relative influence of those discourses upon women's perceptions of their encounter with domestic violence, proposing that a relational discourse offers the best understanding of women's stories. The idea of transitional stories is afterwards explored in several ways. The first is to consider its connection to narrative types. The second is to consider the relational and biographical elements of the stories, with an emphasis upon the ways in which a theory of gender and of intersectionality can be combined with ideas about biographical disruption in thinking about women's responses to domestic violence. The third key feature involves thinking about the embodied and emplaced nature of the stories, with reflections upon their incorporation of

imagination and time, suggesting that together these elements combine to map out women's changing sense of belonging. A final and crucial element of this chapter is to pay attention to how an understanding of transitional stories contributes to the development of services that support women living with, and moving away from domestic violence - with accountability and the integration of services being the way in which that contribution is framed.

8.2   Domestic violence discourses

In order to develop this discussion it is necessary to think about the way in which women's stories resonated with literature pertaining to discourses of domestic violence. This is done in order to ascertain the relative influence of those discourses upon how the women's stories were framed as well as offering a critique of those existing discourses. Chapter 2 identified a number of ways in which domestic violence is represented within literature: statistical analysis of crime data and economic data; sociological and psychological discourses; the influence of intersectionality upon domestic violence literature; first-person accounts within academic and biographical literature; and arts-based representations. The relationship between this research and other arts-based representations will be addressed in the following chapter, where I evaluate the methodology; here I am concerned with how the women's stories related to more traditional quantitative and qualitative discourses.

In terms of quantitative methods, this research did not set out to generate quantitative data and in its work exclusively with women, was not able to engage with the arguments about how quantitative data is collected or the prevalence of symmetrical and asymmetrical domestic violence (Johnson, 2011; 2008). The research did though show how domestic violence incorporates acts of coercion and control and that this can be perpetrated by extended family as well as by partners and thus supports the widening of the terms of reference used within crime statistics around domestic violence. The stories told were also able to corroborate data about the impact of domestic violence upon mental health (Department of Health, 2003), physical health (Crisp & Stanko, 2001), homelessness (Crisp & Carter, 2002), and employability (Matjasko, Niolon & Valle, 2012; Crowne *et al*, 2011; Helfrich and Rivera, 2006). The stories also reinforce quantitative data about women not being adequately responded to by services (Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2003; Hague *et al* 2001). It was suggested that quantitative data alone cannot truly represent the reality of domestic violence but with the help of research such as the type conducted here it can become more three-dimensional, and what this research highlights is

that there is a need to develop longitudinal quantitative measures of how women's actions, as they transition away from domestic violence, might protect them against future experiences of domestic violence.

Chapter 2 spent a considerable amount of time trying to make sense of how domestic violence has been framed within psychological and sociological perspectives. The psychological model primarily pays attention to the influence of individual behaviour within the perpetration of domestic violence, or in how it impacts upon individuals, with attachment theory being one important recent addition to how a psychological model explains domestic violence (Barner & Carney, 2011). The sociological model on the other hand, frames domestic violence as a consequence of structural and hierarchical forces within society, primarily those forces emanating from differences of gender but also including other forces such as ethnicity and economics. It is the sociological model, via feminism, that has framed domestic violence as a consequence of patriarchal structures and institutions (Hague & Malos, 2005). In thinking about these different explanations for domestic violence, Haaken (2010) suggests that there has been a tendency to over-value certain explanations at the expense of others: the sociological over the psychological within the women's refuge movement, for example. Conversely, Kelly (2011) argues that within a medical framework it is the psychological explanation that has been over-valued. The conclusion I reached within Chapter 2 was that there is an uneasy relationship between these views, concurring with Nicolson (2010) that the dialogue between them is often awkward. An inter-disciplinary position can be difficult to maintain, although evidence of the two disciplines complementing one another is to be found (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2010; 2007).

One example of this uneasy relationship is evidenced in how trauma is understood within domestic violence literature. Rosewater (1990) critiqued the psychological model of trauma as ignoring the social context of women's lives, whilst Michelle Gross and Sandra Graham-Bermann (2006) critique the limited incorporation of gender within psychological models of trauma and PTSD. However, Brison (2002) argues that a diagnosis of PTSD can be useful where a woman's attempt at recovery has been limited by being told that her problems are all 'in her head' (p.80), whilst Abrahams (2007) argues that a psychological model of PTSD is useful for some women but not for all, and that a model that takes account of social relationships is a better fit. Abrahams (2010) also argues that trauma can disrupt the ability to envision a future; a view that aligns with the notion of biographical and relational disruption associated with both serious illness and with violent sexual assault (Brison, 2002; Frank, 1995; Bury, 1982). In this research, examples of this type of disruption were evident in

images such as figure 7.1 that showed Emma's uncertainty about the direction her future might go in; similarly, the box that Anne constructed (figures 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6) also evokes a sense of uncertainty about the future in terms of access to children. However, anxiety and uncertainty about the future is different to not being able to envision it at all and in this respect all of the participants were able to contemplate a future even if that was not always easy for them to do so. Whilst there was no substantial explicit mention of trauma or of being traumatised, Anne used these phrases to refer to how illness had made her vulnerable to domestic violence and how she felt uncared for and not listened to. This suggests that trauma as an explanatory discourse for the participants was limited, and that an everyday understanding of domestic violence, as expressed within the women's stories, does not reflect the medical and psychological discourse that links domestic violence with PTSD. Whilst it is possible to suggest that the way in which some women felt confused by the passage of time, witnessed in the appearance of clocks and watches in various images (figure 6.4, 6.11 and 7.1), indicates an experience that is associated with PTSD, the person who made the most reference to trauma was me, with the term appearing frequently within my field notes and my embodied responses to the women's stories. This was especially true where there was reference to being estranged from children; this I suspect is due to my own experience of being a parent and my exposure to the psychological model of trauma during my training as an art therapist.

The women's stories show that they were able to make use of both sociological and psychological explanations to some extent within the representation of their experiences and thoughts about the present and the future; so that whilst an exploration of the causes of domestic violence encountered did not form part of women's stories, its consequences upon their lives in the present and the future was of concern, and within those explorations there was attention to both personal and collective consequences. Anne for example spoke about the need to address her own emotional barriers, with the words "*In my adult life . . it's about learning to take them walls down*" and the image in figure 6.13 illustrates this. Elsewhere, Anne spoke about the need to manage her own anger as part of this process. Much of the representations around decision-making, determination and acceptance point towards the women framing their thoughts about those practices within a psychological explanation, so that where Emma talks about being a survivor or Carol talks about the need to release difficult feelings, these are personal processes. Such examples indicate that, at points, personal psychological processes appeared within the representations of how the women managed and understood their thoughts, feelings and plans for the future. However, there was

nothing in the women's stories to suggest that they perceived themselves as passive victims, or were making use of explanations that pathologised themselves. This suggests that the prevalence of such discourses, explanations and social definitions, identified as being prevalent at one time (Dobash & Dobash, 1992), have receded from the common understandings of domestic violence. In terms of how the women referred to themselves, the victim and survivor labels were rarely used, whilst the term resistor never appeared when women spoke about themselves. However, as evidenced in chapters 6 and 7, considerable attention was given to the implications of relationships with other individuals, both in terms of help-seeking behaviour and those feelings of frustration and resistance, and it was there, drawing upon the work of Kelly (2011) and Allen (2012), that the notion of resistance was used within my interpretation of women's stories.

Nicolson (2010) suggests that the respondents of her own research drew much more upon psychological and behavioural explanations than sociological explanations to explain why those who were violent towards them acted in the way that they did (alcohol use or abusive childhoods for example). Within my own research it is not possible to corroborate or challenge this idea because the women did not address the causes of the domestic violence they encountered, but in terms of thinking about their own present and their ideas about the future it seems that the psychological explanation formed just one element of women's understanding of the effect of domestic violence upon their lives. Moreover, whilst an explicit sociological discourse of domestic violence in terms of structural forces of gender and power was only referenced in a limited way, the more frequent discourse employed was one that included reference to the women in relationship to other people, agencies, organisations and the physical environment. It may be that my presence as a man inhibited the women in talking about patriarchy, for example; however, this did not hinder Lisa (figure 7.4) and assumes that I had more power than I imagined I had as a researcher. Many of the women had attended the Freedom Programme and so would have encountered ideas around gender and power - if they had not done so already, of course. It is clear though that in their accounts, thoughts about power existed in many forms, so that different kinds of relationships - with women, men, children, agencies and services - led to the women feeling powerful and powerless, even though they did not equate this to gender or patriarchy. The findings of this research thus corroborate what Lempert (1996) found in asking women about their responses to living with domestic violence: that there is limited reference within women's stories to the social and political implications of their experiences in terms of thinking about institutional oppression and interpersonal violence being gendered. I would argue, based upon the

women's stories, that such discourses are filtered through thoughts about inter-personal relationships; the implications of this are that it is crucially important to pay attention both to the institutional *and* relational context of domestic violence as opposed to taking a dyadic approach that divides sociological and psychological discourses.

The relational aspect of the women's stories, and the way in which they addressed the everyday and embodied nature of their experience, finds resonance in Vanessa May's (2013) examination of how the concept of belonging is a better way of conceptualising the link between individuals and society than that offered by theories of identity. Adopting a phenomenological position, May writes that 'a relational view of society entails that society is not a 'thing' that exists in and of itself, but is constantly in the making in the interactions between people' (p.56); adding that 'society is constituted not only of how people relate to each other, but also their relationship to their material environment' (p.57). This view means that paying attention to how relationships are perceived and managed allows a bridge to be formed between psychological and sociological discourses, and ties this firmly to the physicality of everyday life. May (2013) also places change and motion very centrally into the concept of belonging: a position that aligns with my own notion of transitional stories representing the material and relational responses to domestic violence as they evolve over time.

The prevalent discourse within the women's stories then was one that focused upon the interpersonal and material aspects of everyday life and it is this, I argue, that provides an understanding that comes closer to the women's standpoint than the adoption of a purely psychological or structural understanding of domestic violence.

8.3   Narrative types

As well as the stories depicting relationships between the women and other people, they also reflect the relationship the women had with themselves, and this observation is developed further in thinking about narrative types. A reading of medical sociology (Radley, 2009; Frank, 1995; Kleinmann 1989; Bury, 1982) reveals how illness can disrupt and fragment a person's life and sense of a whole self. A similar effect is observed in the impact upon the self of violent assault (Brison, 2002). What this research shows is that experiences of domestic violence are equally disruptive to the self. The consideration of what constitutes a transitional story includes looking at how the women's stories incorporated thoughts and feelings about relationships and their biography. As indicated above, whilst there were

occasional elements within the women's stories that hinted at the use of a structural understanding of domestic violence, the more common framework within which women referenced their responses was one that explored themselves through the lens of the personal relationships they had to other people, agencies and organisations, or to the physical environment. Examples of this can be found in how women explored the relationship they had with friends, family, ex-partners, in-laws, children or representatives of agencies such as social services or Women's Aid. Carol, Jane and Anne all explored in detail the relationship they had, or wanted to have, with their children. Jane spent considerable time thinking about the relationship she had with her ex-partner's mother, whilst several of the women made reference to the beneficial role that friends played in their lives – both Margaret and Emma suggested that the friendships they had with other women assisted them in their movement away from domestic violence. Margaret, in discussing figure 6.12 for example, mentions her and her friends supporting and listening to one-another. Positive experiences were reported with those agencies and services that listened to the women, whilst those that did not listen were experienced as being punitive and unsupportive; both of which act as commentary upon the relationships that the women had, or wanted to have.

The significance of this research then is that thoughts about personal relationships formed a primary way in which women thought about themselves in the present and in the future. The women did this in the context of relationships far more frequently than they thought about themselves in psychological isolation or as elements within social structures. This is not to discount the power of autonomy and independence for the women, and there were plenty of examples of wanting to create an environment within which they could find that independence or time for themselves, but there was a continual return to thinking about the self in relationship to others. What I witnessed was akin to how both Frank (1995) and Brison (2002) identify that the way in which the telling or showing of one's story is both an act of autonomy and an act of connection to other people. Where Brison writes of the relational self I take this to mean that a person's sense of identity is a consequence of a narrative not only being told to oneself, including the relationship between different aspects of the self, including the self at different points in time, but of a narrative witnessed and received by others, and of a narrative of self in relationship to others. Brison writes that 'one must (physically, publicly) say or write (or paint or film) the narrative and others must see or hear it in order for one's survival as an autonomous self to be complete' (p.62), suggesting that '[t]his reveals the extent to which the self is created and sustained by others and, thus, is able to be destroyed by them' (p.62). There is a mixture of autonomy and relativity here, and

one way to think about this mixture is to think of it in terms of inter-dependence or of inter-subjectivity. Whilst this might seem to refer to the act of telling one's story after the event, it can be read to refer to acts of being and acts of becoming, in the sense of how one relates to others now and in the future and the ways in which those relationships contribute to a person's subjective identity. What the women's stories reveal is that the relationships they had in the past, in the present and in their imagined futures all contributed to their sense of self, and this accords with May's (2013) understanding of the relational self. Their stories also reveal how they were managing the relationship between different, sometimes contradictory, aspects of self: the vulnerable self of the past, the uncertain self of the present, and the determined self of the future for example. The second aspect is closer to Brison's (2002) and Kelly's (2011) understanding of the relational self than it is to May's (2012) use of that term, although both elements of the relational self were in evidence within the images and the words used by participants.

The main way in which Frank considers relationships, within his consideration of how individuals tell their stories of illness, is to also think about the need for stories to be heard and seen by others and the ways in which individual narratives relate to commonly accessible meta-narratives that allow for reflexive responsibility as 'the storyteller seeks to reclaim her own experience of suffering' (1995, p.18). Frank's reference to meta-narratives fits closely to Cohen and Taylor's (1992) use of master scripts in their consideration of how individuals attempt to create unique scripts, narratives and roles for themselves that allow them to gain a sense of escape from whatever everyday reality assails them. In Chapter 5 I suggested that the women were employing scripts that attempted to challenge those master-scripts and master-narratives that exist about being good partners and family members, at the same time as conforming to gendered master-scripts about the good home-maker. When considering the way in which some of the women represented their desire for a return of children and a harmonious family it is possible to consider this an example of wanting to restore a master-script or meta-narrative about the good and complete family. This sense of restoring what has been lost fits with Frank's notion of restitution narratives (1995) within which stories of recovery are told to reassure the teller and the listener because the 'ill person's own desire for restitution is compounded by the expectation that other people want to hear restitution narratives' (p.77).

I have also suggested that the concept of active recovery (Barnes, 2013) is a better way of making sense of how the women represented their ideas about the physical home in comparison to the narratives of restitution or chaos. I believe that a similar observation can be

made about how the women represented their thoughts about relationships with family and children that appeared in Chapter 6, and about how they managed thoughts around decision making and their determination to make things different which emerged in Chapter 7. Barnes states that active recovery narrative refers to the transitional movement that a woman makes between chaos narratives and narratives that are marked by restitution and quest. It is a process that is defined by women's agency in response to domestic violence and can be a process that both ebbs and flows. In considering the correlation between types of narratives and time elapsed since the ending of violent relationships Barnes observes that 'regardless of time, [there] was the complex and sometimes contradictory interweaving of narratives of restitution, chaos, quest and active recovery in survivors' accounts' (p.393). In the way that women represented their thoughts about home, family and their own identity within this research there is evidence of active recovery narratives, particularly when women were referring to how they were managing their own thoughts and feelings or making changes to the way they conducted their relationships or managed their domestic environments. The notion of active recovery is close to the notion of active resistance (Campbell *et al,* 1998), with them both drawing attention to women's agency. The way in which the women thought about themselves and their experiences in the past, the present, and the future, demonstrated both active recovery and active resistance. The choices made also reveal that notions of agency were crucial components of the women's stories even where they were accompanied by elements of ambivalence and doubt. Transitional stories can be seen then as containing elements of both active recovery and active resistance.

In comparison to active recovery narratives, chaos narratives emerged at points where there was uncertainty, confusion and anger about the loss of children, or where there was an attempt to understand what had happened to them in the past, whilst restitution narratives were evident in the way women spoke about their desire for the return of children or of a harmonious family. Quest narratives were in evidence, often in the form of memoirs or 'interrupted autobiographies' (Frank, 1995, p.120), and only very occasionally as manifestos, within which social injustice formed part of the narrative, although Lisa's reference to social injustice exhibited something that was close to being a manifesto narrative (figure 7.4). There was little evidence of narratives that would fit with Frank's idea of automythologizing quest narratives that 'fashions the author as one who not only has survived but has been reborn' (p.123) and within which the 'body of the storyteller becomes a pivot point between microcosm and macrocosm, and human potential' (p.126). The frequent and varied use of the metaphor of nature could be read as references to ideas about the macrocosm that transcended

the women's immediate concerns but there was no evidence of any of the women explicitly using it in that way. However, that the participants wanted to take part in this research, were willing to tell their stories and were enthusiastic about the creative dissemination of its results, can be read as the women implicitly engaging within that aspect of quest narratives that is concerned with affording the teller the ability to have her story told, and can also be thought of as participants wanting to collectively address the social injustices that underpin domestic violence. Transitional stories therefore include elements of individual and collective versions of the quest narrative.

8.4   Gender and intersectionality within transitional stories

Gender, as an element of the stories told by women, has been addressed at points within the preceding chapters. The reason being that the domestic violence experienced falls into the category of intimate terrorism, which has been statistically shown to be predominantly perpetrated by men against women (Women's Aid 2009b; Johnson, 2008) and can therefore be classed as gender-based violence. The feminist-standpoint component of the research methodology, the way an understanding of situated and embodied imagination is informed by feminist thought, and the support offered by Women's Aid also make the further consideration of gender necessary. Chapter 5 made reference to the social construction of woman as homemaker (Malos and Hague, 1997 cited in Abrahams, 2010) and the gender-differentiated understanding of home and relationships (Wilcox, 2006). In Chapter 6 gender was related to ideas of family and domesticity (Pink, 2012, 2004; Rose, 1993). Also in that chapter, West and Zimmerman's (2002) concept of 'doing gender' was used to think about how women were representing their attempts and desires around the notion of motherhood. I consider here, how within the women's transitional journeys, gender played a role within the movement away from domestic violence and towards an imagined future, and how it intersected with issues of ethnicity, health and economic status.

The stories were gendered in that it was women who were telling their own stories, and therefore can be considered to be intrinsically gendered. As explored within Chapter 2, attention to gender within autobiography is relevant (Gilmore, 2001; Polkey, 1999; Swindells, 1995; Smith, 1993), and that attention to the domestic and familial, as they appear within autobiography, is a legitimate means of understanding women's personal and social lives (Brereton, 1998). The extent though to which that gendering was conveyed consciously, appeared at several points, but was mostly a background issue for the women, and something

to be interpreted later on by myself. Where gender was in the foreground was at those times where parenting and motherhood was the focus, where there was attention to social injustices, and where I asked the question about how my gender influenced participation. Lisa's attention to social injustices was the sole reference to overt political commentary (figure 7.4) and in Chapter 7 I suggested that it was, through its reference to social injustice and coercion within the family, aligned to ideas about patriarchy and thus to a gendered reading of social justice and politics. The main appearance of a gendered theme was where women represented their thoughts about parenting. Anne's comments about not being a perfect mother fit with a criticism levelled at the presentation of an idealised vision of the harmonious and happy mother (Bradley, 2013), whilst again and again the women who were mothers expressed thoughts about their children that exhibited strong indications that their identities were closely aligned to the gendered notion of women being mothers and homemakers; an observation also made by Wilcox (2006) in her own research, who writes that '[t]he centrality to women (who are mothers) of their day-to-day experiences with their children cannot be overstated and these were closely connected to women's sense of self and feelings of intimacy' (p.81). Because the creation, and at times the *re*creation, of home and family formed such a key element to women's movement away from domestic violence, transitional stories are gendered stories. The sense of transition stories being gendered can be expanded to include ideas about gender being a performance (Butler 1988, cited in Nicolson, 2010), and, in its incorporation of agency, a dynamic process of becoming that is a constantly evolving negotiation towards, or away from, socially prescribed descriptions of gender (Villa, 2011). In expressions of a desire to travel and to be self-determining there is evidence of 'hermeneutic freedom' (Smith, 1987 cited in Ailwood, 2011, p,435) within the women's biographical narratives.

Within Chapter 2 there was considerable discussion around the concept of intersectionality, what it proposes about the overlapping forces of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and health (Thiara & Gill, 2010a; Crenshaw, 1991), and how those interactions make women more or less vulnerable to experiencing domestic violence. Within Chapter 2 it was this notion of hidden voices that led to a consideration of intersectionality and different ways of listening to women's voices, and ultimately to asking how art-making and storytelling might add something to those voices. It is important therefore to consider how the women's stories reflected not just their gender but those other forces that intersectionality would propose are just as important in thinking through patterns of agency and resistance. As indicated, all of the participants of the main phase of the research would fit within the

category of 'White British' and therefore the issue of ethnicity did not feature within their narratives. This is not to say that ethnicity is absent from experiences and responses to domestic violence, but for the women within the research, living within a predominantly white British culture, ethnicity was significantly reduced in meaning to become invisible to them. My hunch is that had more women attended the city-based group, where there was wider ethnic diversity, it would have been more visible. In the pilot phase ethnicity became very visible through women's attempts to create representations of 'blackness' by transforming and subverting magazine images that were not representative of their ethnicities and cultures. The one time that ethnicity did become visible within the main phase was where Jane represented the relationship she had with her ex-partner and his family. They did not share a common ethnicity and Jane expressed her frustrations, resistance and agency through reference to those aspects of culture and ethnicity that she either accepted or rejected: food and the kitchen for example (figures 5.4 & 5.5), or child-care choices (figure 6.3).

In addition to ethnicity playing an important role within Jane's experience of, and response to, domestic violence, health and disability also played a role. She made reference to how a diagnosis of cancer and the after-effects of a car accident made her vulnerable to domestic violence. Similarly, Anne referenced her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis as making her vulnerable to domestic violence. Both Jane's and Anne's experiences corroborate Thiara, Hague and Mullender's (2011) identification of the often hidden intersection of domestic violence and disability. One feature of disability that renders a woman vulnerable to domestic violence is the increased likelihood of being economically dependent upon others. This intersection of economic status and illness did enter women's stories. Anne spoke about the small business she once owned and that she appeared to be longing for, whilst Jane expressed a desire to regain the economic independence that she had prior to her experience of illness and domestic violence. The relationship between domestic violence, economic dependency and its impact upon employment, and of economic independence acting as a barrier to experiencing domestic violence, have been clearly identified (Matjasko, Niolon & Valle, 2012; Swanberg, Ojha & Macke, 2012; Crowne *et* al, 2011; Helfrich & Rivera, 2006). The relationship between gender, poverty and domestic violence has been investigated by Wilcox (2006, 2000), who identifies the economic pressures placed upon single-mothers when trying to establish a new home. Wilcox writes that '[i]t is still women (as individuals) who are expected to bear the burden of providing support to children . . . Women are expected to sacrifice themselves within households for the benefit of others' (2000, p.188). For Jane, the experience of forming a new home and being a single mother formed a significant component

of her story and within that story there was reference to seeking agency over her financial choices. Carol, whilst not being a single parent, also made reference to money when speaking about the image she had made when thinking about the kind of support she might want for her and her family in the future (figure 8.1), stating that:

> *"Erm, money, it's not something everyone . needs really but it's (indistinct) for support like you know a home. That's mainly what I'm bothered about. Money isn't a factor with me for anything else; can cope without it; as long as we've got the basics."*

Figure 8.1: Carol, detail of image made in group 1, week 3

Carol, meanwhile, identified a lack of money to the curtailment of pleasure, saying that *"I do like pleasure . when I can I have it . . . Pleasure things cost money. I can't always afford the money so it's (sigh)"*. Future plans for desire and pleasure, as expressed through thoughts of harmony and escape identified in Chapter 5, are therefore contingent upon financial status as well as upon access to supportive relationships. For the women who took part in this research, and who did represent issues of ethnicity and economic status, those issues were

seen as contributors to their experience of domestic violence and its after effects, but those markers of power were able to be manipulated in order to enact agency and resistance. Health concerns on the other hand did not appear to offer the same opportunity.

In terms of the interlinking nature of ethnicity, economic status, and gender, a useful observation is made by Wilcox (2006): 'Where other vertical hierarchies (of class, ethnicity and 'race') frequently entail spatial segregation . . . this is not the case for gendered relationships in heterosexual couples where women and men (usually) share the same spatial location in the home' (p.85). As well as gender differences existing within shared spatial locations, I would also add that health differences frequently exist together, and in Jane's case we also see ethnic differences co-existing spatially. What is observed within the women's stories is that intersecting forces, including gender, coalesced around the spatial and emotional properties of home, choices about domestic order, family relationships, and financial planning. We see that for women to feel that they can exercise agency within their transitional journeys they need to be able to have ownership of all of those forces and choices. Those forces and choices become manifest and played out within the boundary of home, so that whilst the home can be a site of oppressive power it can also, as evidenced within women's stories, become a site of power that enables tactics of liberation and resistance.

Gender makes some appearance within the literature that I have employed that explores illness narratives and biographical disruption (Radley, 2009; Frank, 1995; Kleinmann, 1988; Bury, 1982). Bury (1982) for example makes reference to the role of family and friends within the mobilisation of resources following illness, writing that '[t]he availability of a good friend, especially for many of the female patients in the study being reported here, emerged as a key element in the picture' (p.175). Such an observation aligns with what a number of the women reported in this research. Margaret in particular made great use of her friends to achieve a sense of harmony and well-being, whilst many of the women were, like Bury's participants, 'inevitably drawn into rearranging his or her wider personal and community involvements' (p.175) as well as their familial relationships. If, as argued, family is a gendered concept, then the kind of biographical disruption and adjustment that Bury observes, where it involves a consideration of family relationships is likely to be gendered.

Where gender does appear more strongly within theories of narrative and biographical disruption is within Brison's work (2002). Brison draws heavily upon feminist thought to argue for the value of incorporating first-person narratives within philosophies that are

concerned with identity and in her attention to how biographical narratives can help to re-make the self following trauma. Brison observes that trauma often involves disruption to the person's perception of the physical body; the vulnerability of the body is exposed and by implication so is the self. Brison refers to Jean Amery's (1995 cited in Brison, 2002) comparison of torture to rape, writing that this is 'an apt description, not because both objectify and truamatize the victim, but also because the pain they inflict reduces the victim to flesh, to the purely physical' (p.46), adding that '[t]his reduction has a particular anguished quality for female victims of sexual violence who are already viewed as more tied to nature than men and are sometimes treated as mere flesh' (p.46-47). Domestic violence, it can be argued, is a similar experience in the sense that it will expose the vulnerability of the body, with particular consequences upon women, where society has placed such weight and emphasis upon the connection between women and their bodies. Not only did women show that their relational selves were disrupted through domestic violence, but also that the traumatic effects of domestic violence disrupts the body. This can be observed within the women's stories, not so much in any direct reference to the physical body, but more upon where they paid attention to the ways in which they might find safety within the physical comfort of home or of some imagined holiday destination. If, as Brison (2002) argues, violence disrupts the concept of the body, and that violence also exposes vulnerability that women responded to with imagination, agency and resistance, it is possible to think about the women's transitional stories as exhibiting the kind of corporeal vulnerability that Murphy (2012) proposes as forming part of an emerging feminist ontology. The feminist ontology that Murphy proposes, seeks to not only understand the vulnerability associated with violence, but also the vulnerability that comes about through telling and making visible, and is associated with the potential for care and compassion between individuals. Vulnerability following illness or violence isolates the individual, whilst the sharing of that vulnerability counters that isolation. The transitional stories shown here exhibit this feature where the women were able to make their vulnerability and strength visible to themselves, to each other, to me, and to a wider, unknown audience.

Gender then, alongside ethnicity, economic status and health, played an important, if not always central part within women's stories, and each of them were able to display agency in their attempts to negotiate those forces as they steered themselves away from feelings of vulnerability and towards a better future.

8.5 Embodiment, emplacement & emplotment

As shown, the way in which women most often expressed their acts of agency was through the management of relationships and engagement with the physical environment, and an important finding of this research is that the various processes associated with the movement away from domestic violence are bound up with the physical environment, and that the embedding of the personal and the inter-personal within the physical environment stretches forwards in time in a way that can allow women to assert agency and take ownership of both their present and future lives. Here, I expand upon how transitional stories are situated in place (emplacement), in body (embodiment) and in time (emplotment).

The concept of embodiment was identified as a strong guiding principle within the epistemological and methodological foundations of the research, but what emerged from the women's stories was that not only was embodiment an appropriate concept to integrate into the research, but also how strong the sense of place was for many of the women; for this reason an incorporation of the concept of emplacement is necessary. As Pink (2009) identifies, whereas embodiment relates to the interconnections between the mind and the body, emplacement refers to the multi-sensory integration of the mind, the body and the environment. Pink argues that emplacement within ethnography means paying attention 'to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment' (P.25). The value of seeking to understand the embodied and emplaced nature of experience within the study of domestic violence finds support within how O'Neill (2008) articulates the significance of using participatory art techniques when working with refugees and asylum seekers. O'Neill writes that '[t]he texts, objects and images emerging from this work have the potential to enable us to experience, imagine the overlapping spaces and places of exile, both physical, mental and social - the embodied experience of exile, displacement and emplacement/belonging' (no page). O'Neill is here referencing the experience of exile, arrival and settlement and of how art enables an imaginative dialogue with both the emplaced and embodied nature of that journey. What O'Neill refers to as a sense of belonging is a coalescence of the physical, emotional, relational and political, and finds resonance in May's (2013) use of belonging to understand the link between the everyday lives of individuals and social structures. The emplacement and belonging that O'Neill identifies within the experience of refuge and migration can, I suggest, be transposed to the experience of transitioning away from domestic violence so that the sense of belonging that O'Neill identifies within diaspora communities might in some

way find equivalence in the way women who have experienced domestic violence seek security and safety within the home, and within renewed and reclaimed relationships with family, friends and those agencies that offer them empathic support. There is, I suggest, a similarity between the experience of refugees, asylum seekers, and those who have experienced domestic violence: the experience of being exposed to or witnessing violence; the sense of exile; the seeking of sanctuary; the sometimes precarious and chaotic nature of daily existence; the hope and anguish of a return to what once existed; and the desire for a safe and harmonious future. The crucial difference is that those diaspora communities that are formed by refugees, asylum seekers - and economic migrants also – will be larger and more tightly knitted together than any community that emerges from the coming together of people who have experienced domestic violence, primarily because domestic violence isolates individuals and families and very often forces them into remaining hidden. Domestic violence refuges might offer some parallel to the experience of diaspora communities, although the difference in time spent in either does not allow a direct comparison. This is not the place to be making an extensive comparison between domestic violence and political asylum, but it is the case that parallels exist; this is particularly so when the gendered element of political, sexual and domestic violence is considered, or the similar effects upon self and identity of such experiences are examined (Herman, 2001).

Turning to embodiment, a crucial component of the way in which Frank (1995) thinks through narratives is the role of the body within stories told about illness. What Frank refers to as the *communicative body* appears within the way in which quest narratives explore the narrator's communication of their confrontation with the contingency of the physical body; it appears also in the consideration of the way in which narratives speak of and for the other through testimonies of the suffering and recovering body, with Frank stating that '[i]llness stories are told by bodies that are themselves the living testimony; the proof of this testimony is that the witnesses *are* what they testify' (1995, p.140, original emphasis). Domestic violence, whilst not being an illness in the medical sense of the word, very much encircles the physical body, either because of direct physical violence, the threat of it, or, as evidenced within this study, the disruption brought about to the relationship between the women and their physical environments. Brison (2002) similarly highlights the connection between the body and the mind, or the disruption of that link following violent trauma; and whilst not as explicit as Frank in her incorporation of the body into explorations of survival and recovery narratives, does speak about the process of 'physically remastering the trauma' (p.76). For Brison this was achieved through self-defence training. Within the women's transitional

stories physical remastering was most obvious within their management of the material aspects of the home. It was also partly apparent within their engagement with the natural environment; an engagement, that whilst being mostly of symbolic and metaphorical value, also hinted at how it offered an actual place to be physically present and away from the emotional pain of having lived with domestic violence. So whilst the physical body did not figure strongly within the women's stories, the representation of the interaction and management of the physical environment exposed not only the embodied nature of their experience but also the emplaced nature of the women's stories.

Returning to the point about emplacement, and how this has been observed within stories of migration (O'Neill, 2010, 2008) and within those transitional stories told by women in this research, a feature of emplacement is that it is connected to both corporeal and temporal movement. Corporeal movement was a strong feature within the women's stories where those stories represented a movement between homes or the desire to travel. Accompanying that representation of physical movement, movement through time featured strongly within the stories told. This temporal movement was implicit, in the sense that any story will imply a shift between points within a narrative; it was also explicit in those representations where women represented their thoughts about how they thought about the past, the present and future. Figure 7.1, made by Emma, and Figure 7.2, made by Carol, both show how the making of images allowed an expression of the flow of time and the accompanying feelings of ambivalence and hope. Where women used images of clocks and watches (figure 8.2) this seemed to indicate feelings of ambiguity about the flow of events. As indicated in Chapter 7, this expression of time can be read as exposing an underlying metaphor of time as uncertain.
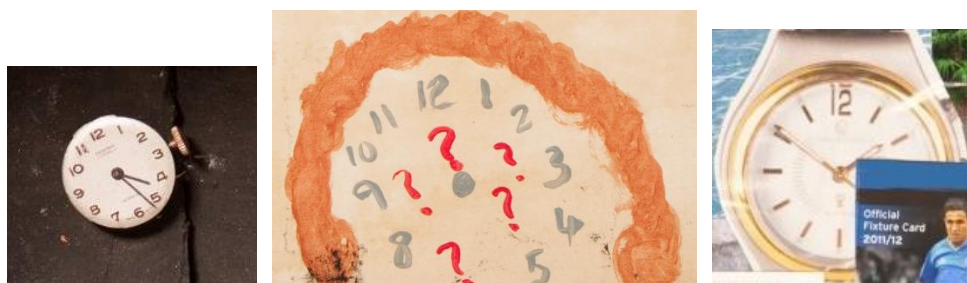

Figure 8.2: Watches and clocks. Left to right, detail from figures 6.4, 6.11 and 7.3

The women though, in their telling of narratives and construction of stories, were making attempts to extract meaning and impose an order upon their experiences of time. In this way,

the agency that was expressed about their management of home and relationships can be seen as being repeated within the way they took control of the stories they told, and can be thought of as form of emplotment. Emplotment, as Frank (2010) writes, means to take the 'brute sequence' (p.137) of events and to find connections and purpose between different experiences and different points in time: '[t]o emplot is to propose a plot that transforms what are still incoherent things-that-are-happening into experience that has meaning' (p.136-7). Emplotment is a relevant term to be using about the women's stories because it takes those feelings of disconnected and confused experience – including the very flow of time – and makes a coherent structure of them. Frank also identifies institutional emplotment as the imposition of intuitional or group meaning upon individual experience. This form of emplotment seems strongly related to his earlier identification of a typology of narrative types (1995) that individuals either adopt or resist in response to illness. Institutional emplotment, within the women's stories, made an appearance within the expression of their encounters with different services and within the appearance of wider social narratives about gender, home and family. In the women's stories there was both acceptance and rejection of institutional emplotment. For example, there was a strong association with the role of homemaker, whilst the role of passive victim or failed mother was strongly resisted. Either way, there was an active response to such forms of emplotment that was personal and political, emotional and physical.

The sense of place and time being a structural, as well as personal encounter, that the foregoing discussions about emplacement and emplotment involve, can be related back to Rose's (1993) thoughts about feminism and geography introduced in Chapter 6; and whilst Rose does not use the term emplacement or emplotment, her exploration of the gendered body as it is represented within geography would suggest that the terms fit with her understanding of how physical spaces are negotiated in ways that are gendered. In Rose's words, this is expressed in the following way when considering the notion of time-geography:

> Time-geography was adopted by some of the earliest feminist geographers, and it is not hard to see why: it recovers the everyday and the ordinary, and many feminists have argued that the mundane world of the routine is the real of women's social life in masculinist society. Examining the lives of women requires attention to the ordinary, to the unexceptional, because women are excluded from arenas of power and prestige (p.22)

The relevance of this quote is the way in which it draws attention to 'simple' everyday tasks and activities and makes them a site for the expression of power and agency. It aligns with Pink's (2007a, 2004) attention to gender and domestic space within sense-based ethnography, and gives extra value to how the women in this study expressed their relationship with the home and domestic activities and to how Abrahams (2010, 2007) also identified women's desire to create new homes for themselves. The time-geography that Rose refers to is relevant because so much of how the women exhibited resistance, agency and recovery emerged through the everyday acts associated with home and relationships with family and friends. It was also exhibited in their desire for those things in the future; in fact, within this research the concepts of time-geography, embodiment, emplacement and emplotment can all be extended to include how they appear within the imagined futures that form part of women's transitional stories. What is observed within the women's stories is how their transitional stories started during the time that they lived with domestic violence and continued within and beyond the period of leaving and rebuilding. The song lyrics used by Emma for example show how music, with its strong sensory quality and evocative lyrics, allowed her to manage and survive living with violence, contributed to her determination to leave and stayed with her as part of her guide for the future. The music and lyrics became therefore a key part of Emma's transitional story. The music and lyrics that Emma referenced are embodied due to the their sensory qualities; emplaced because Emma shows how she associated them to different environments; formed part of her need to impose meaning on what had happened, and thus a form of emplotment; and in the ordinariness of being listened to, are markers of the kind of power that appears within Rose's (1993) understanding of time-geography. To a lesser extent the way in which Jane represented her choice of decoration and food showed a similar set of qualities in terms of her present life and hopes for the future, but without an indication of how she used those things to show resistance and agency when living with domestic violence.

The transitional stories that women presented were then inclusive of the body and of place and allowed the representation of how agency, identity and belonging changes dynamically through time. The imaginative, sensorial and temporal qualities of the stories, with their inclusion of the future and their contingency upon interpersonal and structural forces, illustrate how transitional stories are both situated and embodied. Where there is a strong emphasis within transitional stories upon imagination, which in Chapter 3 was itself identified as being situated (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002) and embodied, this is to be expected

8.6   Summary of transitional stories

This chapter has introduced the concept of transitional stories to frame the way in which the women used visual images and words to represent their movement away from domestic violence towards a future that allowed them greater freedom, harmony and self-determination. Much of that movement and agency is expressed through the management of the physical environment and the management of relationships, with the two, at points, merging. A primary feature that I have identified about transitional stories is that they are extendable into the future and are heavily imbued with a sense of place and located within a social and political context; a context that I have suggested is mostly shaped by gender, but also by economics, health and ethnicity.

This chapter has shown how those transitional stories can be placed relative to those themes identified within Chapter 2 that are concerned with discourses of understanding domestic violence. The observation has been made that the stories showed little explicit reference to sociological, psychological or political discourses of domestic violence. There was though however an implicit incorporation of aspects of those discourses: women did represent their emotional lives and these were intimately linked with how they related to other people and in this way there is a subtle mixing of psychological and sociological discourses of how women respond to domestic violence. Aspects of determination, hope, agency, doubt and uncertainty were very often couched within thoughts and feelings the women had about relationships, confirming other research that places an emphasis upon the importance of relational elements of daily life as being crucial to an understanding of how women both survive and resist the effects of domestic violence (Kelly, 2011). As such, I argue that a relational discourse is a more appropriate way of understanding women's responses to domestic violence. What the stories created add to this is how important the physical environment was in terms of safety and agency, in ways that not only used physical environments to frame relationships, but also used those environments to find personal freedom and harmony. It has been shown in other research that the creation of a new home is important to women (Abrahams, 2010) and forms an important element of what Abrahams terms reinvestment (Abrahams, 2007). What this research shows, in very concrete ways, is the central importance of that creation in helping women to manifest power, agency and emancipation on their own terms. Domestic violence is violence against the self and violence to the very idea of domesticity and all that it implies in terms of safety, security, family and community. It is an attack on women's sense of self, identity and sense of belonging (May,

2013). Because the domestic space is still very much a gendered space – in the sense that women are expected to take on the bulk of responsibility for household management and child-care within the home – that disruption to the domestic space, including the experience of flight and re-homing, is especially damaging and traumatic for women who have experienced domestic violence. The desire to rebuild a home is therefore an essential element for those women engaged in the remaking of the self following domestic violence. The remaking of the home, and the relationships it contains, thus becomes an important expression of women's agency and resistance. The projection of those ideas about agency and resistance into the future are essential elements of the journey away from domestic violence and thus of women's transitional stories, but that projection needs to have a solid foundation within the present and a sense of purpose and meaning recovered from the past. Transitional stories enable the telling and showing of those different points in time and associated roles.

Theories of narrative and biography associated with serious illness (Frank, 1995; Bury, 1982) and violent trauma (Brison, 2002) have been shown to be an appropriate way of conceptualising the stories that women expressed. A key feature to emerge is that the biographical narratives that women created are dynamic and layered. There is not a simple progression from living with domestic violence in a state of fear and powerlessness towards a life of freedom, choice and happiness. Instead, this research confirms that the movement away from domestic violence is complex and that the movement towards a better future ebbs and flows, along with feelings of hope and frustration. The kind of remaking of the self that is expressed within the stories is one that is marked by a sense of active recovery (Barnes, 2013) and active resistance (Campbell *et al,* 1998). What I refer to as transitional stories reflects the notion of recovery and resistance being a fluid process. The tactile and non-linear properties of the images created by the women allowed for the appearance of that fluid and multi-layered process to emerge; the images therefore allowed both the agency and ambivalence that marks out transitional stories to appear in equal measure. This means that transitional stories, and their associated images, are not always easy to understand or be with, but they accurately represent the challenges and successes associated with moving away from domestic violence and of how the past, the present and the future work together within that movement. Jane's statement that *"I couldn't move forward if I didn't look back"* yet again can be held up as a key verbal expression of the way in which the past and the future are contingent upon one another, with both requiring attention if women are to move away from domestic violence with confidence and hope. Jane's words also support the idea that transitional stories, when expressed visually, enable the integration and reframing of both

memory and imagination in ways that allow meaning to be played with and taken ownership of. Agency, within transitional stories, thus applies as much to how meaning is taken control of and represented, as it does to how power is enacted through plans for the future, relationships and everyday actions.

Transitional stories allow an alternative, yet complementary, kind of story to be told than those that appear within quantitative data about domestic violence or verbal accounts of living with and leaving domestic violence. In its expression of multiple and layered points in time, the simultaneous showing of different physical spaces, and the merging of memory and imagination, it gives tangible expression to the experience of living with and beyond domestic violence as something that is complex, uncertain, fragile and ambiguous. It also makes manifest how agency is employed across time and is associated with both tangible everyday domestic acts, the more intangible management of relationships, and the desire for escape and harmony. The fluidity of transitional stories means that they can only ever be situated and approximated truths (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002); something that 'underscores reality's openness to multiple interpretations' (Frank, 2010, p.160) in the same way that stories of illness do. Transitional stories are then useful ways within which to make sense of women's responses to domestic violence; they provide an insight into the complex connections between the perceptual, relational and material properties of women's everyday lives as they move away from domestic violence.

8.7 Implications for practice

It is important to consider how transitional stories and the insights they offer can be translated into meaningful action. I propose that the implications for practice of transitional stories can be divided into issues of accountability, integration and meaning.

Accountability refers to how the findings of this research demonstrate that the support offered to women who are living with domestic violence works best when it listens attentively to what women want for themselves in the present *and* in the future. The women's stories showed very clearly that being listened to and transparently communicated with is high on their agenda when it comes to evaluating the effectiveness of those services they come onto contact with, and this fits with other research that identifies the value of listening to women in the development of services (Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2003; Hague *et al* 2001), and in the delivery of services (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2010; Hester & Westmarland, 2005; WNC, 2003). Within this research Social Services came in for

heavy criticism, particularly with respect to choices made about access to children. It is accepted that only one component of what is an extremely complex and fraught issue was observed within this research, so that how Social Services might have viewed this issue is not known. It remains the fact though that the women in the research felt like they were not adequately listened to or understood, and if such a perception exists then the likelihood of a good working relationship forming between the women and a service that plays such an important role in their lives is limited. What was especially important for the women was to feel that Social Services understood that they, the women, were making choices and decisions that were aiming towards creating safe homes and families. It was also the case that the feelings of not being listened to or adequately consulted were the result not of one single service failing to do this, but a consequence of a multi-agency approach that has been suggested as leaving women feeling disenfranchised (Home Office, 2009a) where they are not involved in the communication between services. The suggestion made by Allen (2012) that individual workers be assigned to women and to children would seem to be supported by what emerged within this research; however such a development requires adequate resourcing and good communication between all parties to make it effective. It is this aspect of multi-agency working that leads to the suggestion of ensuring that services work in an integrated way that includes and consults women where decisions are made that will have an impact upon their lives. Both accountability and integration are thus related elements of good quality services, and align with the emphasis placed upon such features in the *Health and Social Care Act 2012* (HMSO, 2012c) that sets out the development of UK public health, including responses to domestic violence.

Much more than the comments made about services ability to listen and be accountable, what the transitional stories show is how interconnected the different factors within the women's lives are in terms of their construction of meaning around domestic violence; therefore, as well as services working in an integrated and inclusive way, it is important that interventions take account of how physical, emotional and relational issues work together and how each of those is equally important for helping women to identify future needs and directions. It has been shown repeatedly how important the physical environment was for women in terms of escape and harmony, agency and resistance, the remaking of the self, and relationships with others. It is therefore crucial that a collective and integrated form of support be offered that takes account of this. Legal moves to enable women to stay in the family will make the transition away from domestic violence easier, but where this is not possible then attention to the practical and symbolic qualities of a new home

and its impact upon women's identity and sense of belonging is essential to working with women. The point made earlier about changes to the UK welfare benefit system undermining women's ability to create homes that can welcome back their estranged children is an example of a system not paying attention to the importance home has within identity and well-being. The lobbying of government to make appropriate amendments to the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* (HMSO, 2012b), to ensure that it reflects the particular needs of women transitioning away from domestic violence, is therefore a recommendation of this research.

Like Allen's (2012) suggestion that attention be paid by social workers and counsellors to how women can be helped to develop their identity following the loss of ideals and dreams about relationships, family and home, so I suggest that the reconstruction of identity and belonging be considered as being inclusive of emotional, environmental and relational factors and that a strong focus be placed upon the future. Allen writes that after the experience of domestic violence and the associated processes of resistance and survival 'a woman now returns home to herself and her dreams for the future' (p.125) through the assistance offered by a narrative approach to counselling and support. This resonates with the notion of identity and biography being remade following the disruption brought about by trauma, and, in its allusion to home and the future, tallies with the results of this research. To this suggestion I would add that paying attention to the future is a vital element of working with women who have experienced domestic violence. The transitional stories told by the women show how connected that past, the present and future was for them and how exercising resistance and agency was part of that journey in terms of where they had come from and where they were heading. Counselling and support should therefore attempt to understand how women made use of strategies and tactics of resistance and survival and how those strategies and tactics can be adapted and employed to bring about the kinds of futures women want for themselves. A crucial element of that kind of counselling and support would be to acknowledge in the first instance what that future looks like, regardless of how realistic that representation might be. It would then act as a useful guide for identifying what is important for women now and how services can help women to achieve those aims. Similarly, those representations of acts of escape, which appeared within women's transitional stories, signify that it is important to allow women to express such hopes and desires in order to allow them to remake a sense of direction and meaning.

What this research also contributes to thinking about service development is that employing visual methods allows the exploration and construction of meaning to be witnessed in a more concrete and permanent way than words alone would allow. The

incorporation of means of elicitation other than verbal means is thus offered up as a suggestion for those services that seek to listen to women in as full a way as possible. As the following chapter will set out, the use of arts-based methods of gathering stories is resource intensive and offers up a number of unique challenges, but it does enable unique insights into how women would want to be supported and empowered.

9 : Evaluation of Methodology

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to an evaluation of the methodology employed within the research; a methodology that is distinctive within the study of domestic violence for two reasons: its use of arts-based data collection and its attention to women's imagined futures. Chapter 3 outlined a number of questions that could be asked of this unique methodology; these were:

- In what ways does an arts-based methodology give access to an understanding of women's experience of, and response to, domestic violence that is qualitatively different to what text-based methods can provide? How might it allow marginalised voices and stories to be heard and witnessed differently?

- How might an arts-based methodology turn its attention towards women's futures, when it has been identified that this is an under-investigated area within domestic violence research? How exactly might it be able to do that?

- Is the implied value of participation, embodiment, and the expression of affect justified, and philosophically sound, within an arts-based methodology for researching domestic violence?

- What epistemological and ethical issues emerge within the merging of research, emancipatory and therapeutic principles?

To these questions can be added a consideration of how the incorporation of feminist standpoint theory within the methodology contributed to the validity of the research. This includes drawing together those reflections about my gender within the conducting of the research.

Building upon the epistemological foundations set out in Chapter 3, that same chapter outlined the principles of arts-based methods and introduced a number of evaluation criteria, drawing upon suggestions made by those practitioners and theorists responding to the growth of arts-based and participatory methodologies within education and the social sciences. I proposed that arts-based methodologies could be grouped together under the title of new-paradigm research (Finley, 2003), wherein there is an explicit aim of generating knowledge that is visionary, situated and focused upon social action. The evaluation criteria put forward

were taken from the work of Denzin (2000), Richardson (2000), Finley (2003), and Barone and Eisner (2006). The criteria identified includes asking questions such as: how well does the research illuminate and show the issues being investigated? How is it able to clarify the issues through the use of the arts in an engaging and thoughtful way? In what ways is it able to generate questions and propose how things might be different? In summing up the various criteria in Chapter 3 I observed that there is not a definitive set of criteria, although there are common themes that are clustered around the relationship between participant and researcher, the illumination of social realities and injustices, and the level of resonance with other research. Because each piece of arts-based research will be different there is no single standardised measure of reliability or validity, but the kinds of evaluation criteria just identified, along with those questions set out at the top of this chapter, provide a good enough guide to thinking through the worth of the methodology and the knowledge that it produced.

In order to provide some structure to the evaluation process the discussion is divided in to five parts. These are: engagement with arts-based methods; illumination of injustice and imagined futures; the relationship between research and therapy; relationship to other research; reflexivity. The chapter ends by considering the limitations and implications of employing the chosen methodology.

9.2   Engagement with arts-based methods

In considering the value of arts-based methods within the research of domestic violence it is crucial to pay attention to how the women spoke about their participation and the difference that using visual forms of expression made to their participation. Doing so acknowledges the centrality of participant voices within a feminist epistemology (Letherby, 2003) and the development of knowledge about domestic violence (Hague & Mullender, 2005). A total of seven women were able to engage with the evaluation of the research and one of the questions that I specifically asked during the final session of each group was how the art activities helped to think and talk about domestic violence. Some of the women would also spontaneously talk about their engagement with making images. Both Jane and Emma had had some training in the use of visual media and so had a natural affinity to this way of working, with Emma identifying art as an important element within her plans for the future; figure 7.1 for example shows Emma's expression of this aspect of her vision. As part of her final evaluation Emma wrote that *"It helped me to think deeper about the domestic violence. Things that were supressed deeply strangely came out in pieces of art"*. She also wrote that

"It helped by being in a safe environment, with a small group of women who have been through similar situations". In a similar way Jane stated at the end of her participation that:

> *"It's nice being a part of a group to actually . talk about it pictorially . [Yeah] . mm . I didn't think anyone would understand how I have to work through problems . [Mm] . you know, like this . [What, what using pictures?] mm . and how I decorate my house, how I do my garden, how I dress."*

Both Emma and Jane indicated that the group element of the process, along with the use of visual expression, was useful to their participation. Jane's statement demonstrates that using visual expression allowed the representation of a process that felt difficult to articulate verbally and gave access to everyday activities that are physical in nature. I have argued that the data show how important everyday physical life is within women's transitional stories and Jane's comments demonstrate how she herself was able to identify that visual methods allowed this feature of her story to appear. Other women also indicated that the use of visual methods was useful; Carol stated that:

> *"If you see it visually you can kind of like understand it more. [Yeah] And you can like, sometimes you've done things and you're like . "oh!". Me, it's like the same. I'm talking and I've explained a few things and I'm like "whoa!" I didn't realise . what that meant until now [Mm, mm]. So sometimes I'll do things . and I'll not know until later on down the line why it's there. And I'll go, one day I'll just . "Oh yeah! that's what that means, that what it symbolises"."*

This statement expresses the notion of visual images containing meanings that whilst not being immediately obvious, become clearer over time; an idea that parallels how images are related to within art therapy (McNiff, 2004; Hogan, 2001) and the way that Pink (2009, 2007b) describes a slow paced approach to ethnographic work. Elsewhere, Lorraine simply wrote that *"It's given me a voice".*

These responses made by participants help to answer in a positive way the question posed about how an arts-based method can add to an understanding of domestic violence and allow for different stories to be told and witnessed. The statements made about observing others in the group, being given a voice, and coming to new realisations, provide evidence for the methodology being of immediate value to the participants. They show that the

methodology is able to add to participants' sense of community and belonging and that it can aid in feelings of recognition. Arts-based methods, PAR and feminist-standpoint theory were adopted and synthesised as a way of attempting to enable the different kinds of voices and stories that Chapter 2 identified as being necessary to a full understanding of domestic violence, and to be participant-focused. Those adopted approaches it has been argued, in keeping with new-paradigm research, incorporate emancipation as an important purpose of their design, with imagination forming a crucial method of achieving that purpose. Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies (2002), and Leavy (2007), both suggest that imagination contributes to the political and emancipatory change that feminism strives for, and in Chapter 3 I proposed that, alongside situated imagination, embodied imagination is also a requirement for the emancipatory aims that feminism and other new-paradigm methods value highly. The methodology did allow for the appearance of both situated and embodied imagination, as evidenced in Jane's comments above about the process allowing her to express how she engaged in the decoration of her home and garden. The observations made by some of the women, that in the act of participation they felt that they were better understood by others and that they also had a better understanding of themselves, confirms that the methodology, in a situated and embodied way, did meet the aims of emancipation and witnessing that was hoped for.

Personal emancipation, and the way in which some of the women indicated that they gained an enhanced understanding for themselves, is joined both by my own sense of gaining a better understanding of the experience of domestic violence, and via resonance with existing literature and public knowledge, to wider experiences of domestic violence. Through the dissemination of this research, personal acts of emancipation and witnessing spreads outwards in circles; starting with the participants, via my interpretation and responses, and then onwards to be encountered by future audiences.

A more ambivalent response to the question of how making visual images helped to think about domestic violence emerged where Lisa responded by writing:

"By reminding me of past events when looking at other's works and hearing them. I was reluctant to talk about my issues as I didn't wish to be reminded thank you! Didn't really want to talk about it, already done so on the Freedom Programme."

Likewise Emma wrote that:

"I did start to think it was holding me back towards the end of the course. I was enjoying it at first. Then it felt deeply disturbing. I took the pieces home to work on and found I didn't like having them in my new home to remind me of bad times."

Overall, participation in the group was a positive experience for Emma, whereas for Lisa her experience was more neutral. These concerns that Lisa had about talking about her past and that Emma had about being reminded of the past visually mirrored my own occasional anxieties about the methodology veering too close to something that felt like a form of therapeutic intervention. There was the re-assurance I had that through the design and application of a rigorous ethical framework, guided by an ethics of care approach (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008), much had been done to ensure the well-being of participants. I was ever mindful of the limits and remit of the methodology, but comments such as those made by Lisa and Emma confirmed my concerns about the potential of employing a methodology that, in asking participants to share so much of their thoughts and feelings, could leave them feeling uncertain and vulnerable. This sense of vulnerability, expressed in Lisa's and Emma's comments, which other participants and myself identified with, finds resonance in Murphy's (2012) observations about the place of vulnerability and ambiguity within feminist ontology that was outlined in Chapter 3. There, I identified how vulnerability occupied an ambiguous position within an understanding of imagination, empathy and emancipation. Murphy's (2012) contribution to that position was to observe how corporeal vulnerability could be rescued from its overwhelming philosophical association with violence, with its potential for compassion and care attended to instead and a recognition that the interdependence of relationships between people was of greater validity than the binary position of independence versus dependency. The various comments made by the participants about what they gained from participation, along with the images made, show how the corporeal element of their experience and imagination could be a source of enhanced understanding between those women within the groups, but also how they could sometimes be experienced as difficult and disturbing and capable of exposing women to feelings of vulnerability. This knowledge influences how participants should be informed of the likely impact of any similar research, and indicates that longitudinal research can have a more enduring effect upon participants than research that is shorter in length.

The sense of vulnerability that some participants expressed finds resonance in how Abrahams *et al* (2004) and Williamson (2000) observe that narrative and testimony-based

research runs the risk of being experienced as traumatically cathartic for women who have experienced domestic violence, with the need for adequate support to avoid this being highlighted as an essential requirement when conducting such research. Likewise, Rumbold, Fenner & Brophy-Dixon (2012) identify arts-based research potential to evoke vulnerability within participants and I can confirm that the potential for catharsis and vulnerability is present when engaging in arts-based research with women who have experienced domestic violence. It has been evidenced here that even though the emphasis was mostly upon the present and the future, rather than purely upon the past, the creation of images and the use imagination generated stories that were neither time-bound nor linear. Unsettling feelings from the past seeped into thoughts about the present and the future, and when thinking about the future, the uncertainty that was often felt generated further anxiety. Such a process may have occurred had the research been purely word-based, but I believe that the image-based nature of the method made this process of emotional catharsis more likely because of the sometimes unexpected and unplanned appearance of unsettling thoughts and feelings. However, that we were able to work slowly and were contained within the supportive framework offered by the various services affiliated to Women's Aid meant that where there was the appearance of difficult feelings these were contained and managed in a way that meant that women did not feel out of control. The presence of a support worker within the majority of meetings, access to support workers outside of the group, my willingness to listen in a non-judgemental way, the participants' on-going use of support groups and counselling: all of these contributed to the containment and management of strong emotions.

The observations made in the discussion chapters about the images revealing issues to do with physical environments, agency and relationships add weight to thinking that using visual methods can allow for the appearance of knowledge that is qualitatively different to knowledge that appears using words alone. As evidenced in Chapter 7, where written words appear as a frequent feature within women's images, they can complement both the spoken and written word in ways that allow the aesthetic and sensory qualities of women's stories to emerge and be seen. The poetic use of words and images seen in this research fits with how other researchers value that combination's ability to communicate the complex nuances within lived experience (Mannay, 2013; MacDougall, 2006), or poetry's presentation of mysteries to be contemplated rather than puzzles to be solved (Frank, 2010, 1995). For the study of domestic violence, that nuance and mystery is about the ambiguity of hope and reticence within decision making and the formation of a new home, set of relationships and a future self that is qualitatively related to the self of the past. I believe that making images and

using words in a poetic way allowed women to express their own complex, subtle and ambiguous responses to the puzzling and strange experience of domestic violence, that if explored through standard interview techniques would not have made such a profound impact upon themselves or revealed so much to myself as a researcher and future audiences.

From the way the women engaged with the research, and the knowledge that they generated through the transitional stories they created, it is possible to claim that the methodology was able to illuminate unique elements of how domestic violence impacts upon women's lives and so generate knowledge that is qualitatively different to knowledge of domestic violence that is purely text-based. Those stories were able to clarify a range of issues: how important it is for women to gain a sense of agency through their actions; how agency can be hampered by limitations imposed by services; how important the physicality of home is for women now and in the future; how the home is intimately connected to ideas about relationships and how ideas of the future are shaped by social expectations about gender, home and family. Thus, the methodology did meet the criteria for good quality arts-based research set out by Barone and Eisner (2006) in that it was able to both illuminate and clarify an area of enquiry. I also believe that it gave some women who might otherwise have gone unnoticed an opportunity to have their experience and story seen and heard. Anne for example, whilst finding it hard to verbally articulate the pain of losing contact with her child and her hopes for the future, was able to use the images she made as both a surrogate for the spoken word but also as a complementary form of communication to support her words (figures 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.14).

9.3   Illumination of injustice and imagined futures

In addition to the comments made by Emma that were introduced above to do with not always wanting to consider the past, Emma makes a fascinating observation about regretting taking those physical reminders of the past that were represented within her images into her new home; this is an observation that further enhances an evaluation of the methodology as allowing the embodied nature of women's transitional stories to emerge and to enable the appearance of the interconnected nature of time and narrative within those stories. Kearney (1991) notes how the imagined object fuses the past, the present and the future. As evidenced, the fusion and movement between points in time was an important feature of the stories that women created. In particular, the appearance of the imagined future allowed women to represent their responses to domestic violence in a way that is unique to domestic violence

research. The nature of the methodology, via its employment of visual forms and its slow pace, allowed for the appearance and exploration of the imagined future; as such the methodology did meet that requirement of both new paradigm research and feminist research which both place a consideration of imagined and alternative futures very centrally within their remit (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002; Denzin, 2000). The methodology thus aligned with the epistemology outlined in Chapter 3.

It is clear that the research was able to cast light upon the experience of domestic violence and its effect upon women's present lives and their imagined futures. The defining feature of the methodology, alongside its use of visual imagery, is its explicit attention to participants' futures. This attention to the future and the way in which the stories have been used to think about how services might better respond to women's needs and their desire for change makes it possible to say that the methodology is capable of generating knowledge that can help to illuminate social injustices as they exist now and to imagine how such injustices might be better managed in the future. For example, the research findings were capable of being sufficiently detailed to suggest that particular attention is paid to how services work in an integrated way so that all aspects of how women are attempting to exert control and agency is enabled and that counselling services incorporate attention to women's plans for the future. It was also possible to highlight how changes to government welfare benefits policy - in particular the introduction of the so-called 'bedroom tax' - might be advocated for, thus demonstrating that a methodology that at first glance might appear to be capable of generating only highly situated knowledge is able to contribute to the wider debate as to how action and policy can be crafted that will better serve the needs of those women who have experienced domestic violence.

9.4   The relationship between research and therapy

As intimated at various points throughout this thesis, there were times when the process of working with participants felt closer to being a form of therapy than it did to being research, and just above I have spoken about how the expression allowed by the making of images could occasionally be experienced by some women as making them uncomfortably vulnerable. Those women who took part would occasionally refer to the groups as art therapy or state that their participation felt therapeutic. To begin with this did, for myself, raise concerns that the participation would in some way be damaging for participants and counter-productive. These concerns though slowly dissipated when I observed that participants were

able to continue engaging in the process even where it was upsetting at points for them. I also gained reassurance from working closely with the services that I aligned myself with for the purposes of this research: each woman who took part had a named worker within those services and there was a well-established process of ensuring women's well-being and safety. Over time I also came to realise that the subject of enquiry and the methodology I had formed to investigate it was inevitably going to generate the expression of strong thoughts and feelings that had revelatory and cathartic qualities to them, and that the expression of those would be of benefit for the participants. The ethical protocol I had established had taken account of the possibility of strong affect appearing within the research, and again the support of the host services was a key feature of that protocol. The aspect I was least ready to accept was the therapeutic benefit that the women gained from their participation. What allowed me to become more comfortable with this element was in seeing it as a manifestation of the underpinning philosophy of the methodologies I had chosen to adopt. Participatory arts, PAR and feminist-standpoint methods have an explicit aim of aiding participants as well as future audiences (O'Neill, 2010), but it took some time for the reality of this aim to sit comfortably with my assumptions about research needing to be neutral and disinterested and my fears about an overly therapeutic approach to participants' engagement in the research.

Not enough is written about this aspect of conducting research with people who have experienced traumatic and challenging life events. There is literature that identifies the complexity of trying to empathise with participants (Rice, 2000) and that acknowledges the potential for participants to be re-traumatised through their participation (Abrahams *et al* 2004; Williamson, 2000). Letherby (2003) highlights the tensions that exist between a desire for emancipation and a need for researchers to control the flow of the production of knowledge; a tension that undermines a sense of equality of power within research. This latter point resonates with how, from a feminist perspective, certain forms and aspects of therapy have been criticised as exhibiting an unbalanced power relationship between client and therapist, particularly where there are differences of gender involved (Hogan, 2012). Such observations drive the need to create good ethical frameworks within which to research domestic violence but what is lacking though is an acknowledgement that participation, whilst running the risk of adding to a sense of trauma, might also have the potential to ease such feelings or to give a renewed sense of hope or to enhance well-being. As indicated, within the realms of PAR or feminist standpoint epistemology, emancipation and liberation are advocated for, but these seem to be mostly focused upon the effects of the knowledge generated rather than as a consequence of the moment-to-moment experience of being a

participant. Had the research I conducted been framed as the trying out of a therapeutic intervention then such thoughts would not have arisen because the evaluation of therapeutic potential would have been an avowed aim. This research though has been not been framed in that way and instead is broadly sociological and ethnographic. Where the tension lay was in my sensitivity to women's participation – in the moment to moment sequence of events – that was almost indistinguishable to how I have observed people participating in art therapy. What stopped it being art therapy was my careful guidance away from a sustained attention upon the past, especially the distant past of childhood, and by being more transparent in how I responded to women's images and words than if I was in the role of an art therapist. In hindsight though, guided by how some of the women responded to the question I asked about how me being a male researcher influenced their participation, I wish that I had been even more transparent than I was. My desire to remain neutral and to focus more upon listening than responding was perceived by one woman as being withholding and distant and thus as me expressing an aspect of power that she associated with me being a man; a response that highlights a tension that arises in being a male researcher investigating women's experience of domestic violence as much as it highlights the tension between emancipation and therapeutic potential.

These thoughts about therapeutic potential, emancipation, and my own feeling of ambiguity, can be viewed as an additional point to be made about the role of vulnerability; only this time they are much more inclusive of my own thoughts and feelings, where I felt a sense of ambiguity and vulnerability about the research process. That I was able to acknowledge such feelings, and that participants were able to express their own similar feelings, suggests that I was able meet the criteria of researcher reflexivity, accountability and openness to being questioned by participants that Richardson (2000) and Finley (2003) put forward as being markers of good quality participatory and arts-based research.

9.5   Relationship to other domestic violence research methodologies

A defining feature of how an arts-based method might be considered limited in comparison to other methodologies, in particular where a low number of participants might be involved, is how much its findings can be considered to be generalizable. Arts-based methods are not able to make use of randomization and repeatability in the same way that quantitative or large-scale qualitative methods are able to do. In response to this, particularizability (Butler-Kisber, 2010) has been put forward as an alternative way of thinking about the value of knowledge

generated by arts-based methods. Particularizability proposes that a limited sample size is not considered to be a bar to claiming validity where what knowledge is produced resonates, and finds parallels, with existing knowledge and the lives of research audiences. Such a view draws upon a concept of truth that aligns with how creative forms, such as visual art and the novel, achieve legitimacy and fit with how narratives and stories are considered legitimate within the study of everyday life and ontology (Frank, 2010, 1995). The relevance of this to the study of domestic violence is that, as was identified within Chapter 2, there is a need to develop ways of bringing to light stories of domestic violence that can complement the very large body of knowledge about domestic violence that is drawn from more traditional quantitative and qualitative methods of data gathering, and in particular the everyday lives and plans of women who have experienced domestic violence.

Throughout the discussion of what women created, links have been made to existing domestic violence literature and so it has been comprehensively shown how visual forms can be used to complement and enhance existing knowledge. Some key examples would be: taking ownership of a home environment and how this contributed to women's sense of agency; how being listened to and valued by supporting services contributed or detracted to women's recovery from domestic violence; and how the experience of domestic violence damages women's confidence and self-worth. What this research does is to add another layer of understanding to those insights. Not only do the visual artefacts make those and other issues understandable in a tangible way; they also, through the visual acts of layering and juxtaposition, help to show the interconnections and interactions between them. Crucially, the stories demonstrated the relationship between physical, cognitive and affective experience, the need to hold onto ideas about harmony and escape, and showed how women's experience of domestic violence shaped their perception of, and hopes for, the future. This last aspect has been touched upon in domestic violence a little, but what this research does is to provide a fuller understanding of what the future means for women transitioning away from domestic violence. By providing an expanded and enhanced understanding of particular aspects of the experience of domestic violence, this research, in conjunction with existing literature, is able to form part of a stereoscopic and multiple-lens approach (Huss, 2013; Richardson, 2000) to thinking about domestic violence in a way that enables different forms of story and voice to emerge within domestic violence literature, so that those voices might better contribute to the development and delivery of services that has been called for by other researchers (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2010; Hague & Mullender, 2005).

Within Chapter 2, a range of examples were provided of how the arts have been employed previously within the study of domestic violence (Baird & Salmon, 2012; Frohmann, 2012; Haymore *et el*, 2012; Lev-Weisel & Kleinberg, 2002) alongside some examples of community arts projects. Of those examples it is the work of Frohmann (2012) and Haymore *et al* (2012) that this research most closely resembles. Both of those examples employed photography rather than collage work and both focused upon understanding better women's sense of safety and both had a strong sense of mutual support and emancipation built into their methodology. Like this research, Haymore *et al* (2012) identifies a limited number of participants as offering a challenge to the idea of generalizability but sees this as being offset by the value gained by women who did participate. A range of other authors (Allen, 2012; Abrahams, 2007; Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender and Aris, 2003) have suggested that the arts can contribute to gathering stories that might aid service development and assist women in their recovery but are only able to provide brief anecdotal evidence of what this might look like. This research, alongside that conducted by Frohmann (2012) and Haymore *et al* (2012), goes a long way towards demonstrating, in a systematic and reflexive way, what such an arts-based approach to gathering together women's experience of domestic violence and their thoughts of the future might look like in practice.

Barone and Eisner (2012; 2006) suggest that good-quality arts-based research as well as relating to existing knowledge should be able to generate questions. The questions that this research has generated and that would require further investigation and clarification include the following:

- What responses would emerge if it was possible to engage with the same women at a later point to ascertain how much their ideas about the future had materialised and to again ask the question of what aided and hindered that process?

- How would the methodology and the findings be different were it possible to work with a more ethnically diverse group of women? The limitations imposed by problems of participation meant that all of the women who took part in the main study were white-British and so the potential for gathering data from a wider group, as pointed to in the pilot-study, did not materialise. It would be of great value to discern how ideas of what constitutes home and family, in terms of imagined futures and acts of agency, varies by culture. Doing so would further assist those agencies that work with issues of domestic violence to work in more culturally sensitive ways when helping women to move away from domestic violence.

- What different findings might emerge if other art-forms were employed in the study of domestic violence? My own research has employed collage and simple three-dimensional forms, whilst other research has employed photography (Frohmann, 2012; Haymore *et al*, 2012), but what additional insights would arise were drama or dance to be employed? The attention upon embodied representations of embodied experience, and the worth of that attention evidenced within women's transitional stories, suggests that there is much more to be understood about domestic violence from an embodied perspective. The employment of more physical and performative forms of arts-based research would assist in this understanding.

- It has been shown that it is possible for a man researching women's experience of domestic violence to do this in a sensitive way and that the use of an arts-based method provided a safe way for this to happen. A question to ask is: how might a female researcher have influenced the stories told, and would there have been more attention paid to past experiences of violence and abuse, given the potential to be made vulnerable by such disclosures to a male researcher?

- In a similar way, how might the methodology be adapted to work with men who have experienced domestic violence and what might the differences be between a man or a woman working with men in this way? Likewise, what might an arts-based methodology reveal about men's ideas about imagined futures, the home, family and agency and how are these shaped by gender? Might other themes be more prevalent?

These questions illustrate that the research was of sufficient depth to generate further questions about the subject of domestic violence and that the methodology has the potential to be evolved further.

Overall, it can be said that the methodology and the findings are well grounded in existing literature relating to the study of domestic violence and that it usefully points towards further areas of investigation. Both of these factors contribute to the validity of the design and implementation of the methodology.

9.6   Reflexivity

Throughout this thesis I have referred to how as a man investigating women's experiences of domestic violence I have been required to engage with that difference. From very early on it became evident that not only would I need to work closely with supporting services whose ethos was grounded within the principles of feminism, but also on a personal level I would

need to acquaint myself, and be comfortable with, those principles. I believe that I have approached the vast body of knowledge and competing perspectives within feminism in a way that gave me enough of a framework to engage in the research in a safe but critical way. Contemporary ideas about feminist standpoint and intersectionality have been of great value in helping to consider how the interplay of not only gender, but also ethnicity, class, sexuality and health can shape perceptions of experience and an appreciation of other people's reality.

In this chapter I have already reflected upon my position as a male researcher investigating women's experience of domestic violence with respect to thoughts about vulnerability and the differences in power within the participant-researcher relationship. Various authors have been referenced in those discussions (Murphy, 2012; Letherby, 2003; Rice, 2000; Williamson, 2000) and I have shown that openness to thinking those things through is considered a mark of good quality research (Finley, 2003; Richardson, 2000). The notion of strong objectivity within feminist standpoint epistemology has particular relevance here (Harding, 2004). Letherby (2003) states that '[feminist standpoint] supporters recognize that the production of knowledge is a political act in that the researcher's own personhood is always part of research' (p.45), and in terms of men being advocates and users of reflexivity within feminist standpoint epistemology Harding (1998) writes that men can gain from insights provided by a reflexive position in their own 'struggles against androcentrism and male supremacy in family life, in emotional relations, at work, in public agenda politics' (p.185). These thoughts, along with those offered by male researchers who have also adopted a reflexive and feminist approach to research (Beecham, 2009; Brod, 1998; Hearn, 1998), point towards the value and validity of being a male researcher investigating women's responses to domestic violence. My own encounter with the transitional stories told by women forced me to confront my own memories and desires about home, family and agency and of how those are gendered and become embodied within everyday acts. I was able to reflect upon how my own behaviour within the family home is shaped and formed by how I observed my own parents' domestic arrangements and culturally situated ideas about the gendered division of labour within the home; whilst investigating domestic violence in general made me acutely aware of how my own communication and expression of feelings might be perceived as being coercive and controlling. In this way the research was emancipatory for me as well as for the participants. Being in the same room as the women who were sharing their thoughts and feelings about domestic violence meant that the encounter I had with domestic violence was an embodied one; the literature that I accessed throughout the research process did have a profound impact upon my understanding of

gender, power and violence, but the encounter with the physicality of women's stories and the face-to-face nature of our communication brought that understanding to life. In this way, the notion of embodied and corporeal vulnerability being an aid to a feminist understanding of empathy (Murphy, 2012), that I have associated with the underpinning epistemology of this research, was evidenced in how participants and myself were able to share a physical space and be open to disclosure and witnessing.

I have made some reference already to how one woman found my opaqueness problematic. That same woman also said that my presence as a man meant that she was not able to talk about the violence and abuse she had suffered, in particular sexual abuse, in the way that she would like to have done. This is a real concern and demonstrates that there will be limits to what a male researcher is able to hear and witness when working with women. Other women were able to say that my presence did not act as a barrier to their participation and even went so far as to say that it allowed them to appreciate that some men are able to listen to what they have to say.

9.7 Limitations

Having outlined the key points learnt from the application of the methodology, this chapter ends by considering both the limits and implications of the methodology. The limitations of the methodology are that it is very resource-intensive, that its longitudinal nature problematizes participation, and that the artistic and expressive nature of participation does not suit all participants.

In terms of resources, whilst the cost of materials is a significant consideration, it is time that is the greatest resource. The nature of the methodology meant that it had a big impact upon both participants' and researchers' time management. For example, the slow pace of the research had an impact upon participation, as evidenced in the second group where limited consistent attendance necessitated the conducting of a third group. As well as the time commitment required, one of the biggest barriers to participation was where there was insufficient support provided by the services that I was collaborating with and this primarily was the case within the city-based group. The service there was committed to the research but the very real impact of funding cuts meant that were not always able to provide the transport and crèche that would have enabled the women they worked with to attend the group. This would have happened regardless of the methodology; however, that the design called for participation over a sustained period of time ended up excluding those women who

were not independent enough to attend by themselves. This was a pity because the majority of the women who might have been able to contribute to the city-based group were from minority ethnic backgrounds and therefore women whose stories especially need bringing to light. Therefore any future similar research would need to be structured in a way that either had a guaranteed set of resources for participating services to make use of or was structured in a way that meant meaningful data could be collected in a shorter space of time.

I have outlined earlier in this chapter how the methodology had an emotional impact upon participants. Regardless of the form of data collection, the nature of the enquiry into domestic violence will have made participation problematic in terms of how some women might have felt overwhelmed by their participation, but the introduction of arts-based elements added another layer of complexity and a potential barrier to consistent participation. Occasionally there would be comments made by the women who took part that they were not creative or artistic, and whilst I did reassure them that the aesthetic qualities of the end product was not the aim of the research such sentiments may have had a detrimental effect upon their continued participation and possibly upon initial uptake with a resultant impact upon sampling bias. These observations and those made earlier about vulnerability mean that arts-based research, within the study of domestic violence, can generate unique and insightful knowledge, but the collection of that knowledge presents particular logistical challenges as well as necessitating the careful management of the expression of affect and the provision of a consistent network of support around the participants.

9.8   Methodological implications

Whilst the methodology does have its limitations, it also presents opportunities. The knowledge created within arts-based methods is, to begin with, partial and situated, but as I have shown, when this is related to existing knowledge about domestic violence, it becomes a legitimate component of how domestic violence is understood and responded to. What begins as very particular can become part of what is general. Illumination and insight is enabled through the employment of imaginative forms of expression that in turn have the potential to be disseminated in imaginative ways. There is the potential for an arts-based approach to investigating domestic violence to reach previously un-accessed experiences. I firmly believe that the methodology does enable greater appreciation of the physical and sensual qualities of women's responses to their lives following domestic violence and how they imaged their futures. Most of the women who took part in this research were confident enough to be able

to also articulate themselves verbally but the images they created complemented and instigated what they shared verbally. Any future similar research would do well to expand its remit to include those women who are less confident or less able to articulate themselves verbally. Again, the pity of not having the city-based group run as planned is that many of the women who might have been participants of that group were not native English speaker, thus image-based communication would have been of immense value to them.

In terms of gender, I have demonstrated that being a man is not a bar to directly investigating women's experiences of domestic violence. When this is done in close collaboration with well-established services and framed critically within existing models of understanding gender, when time is taken to be reflexive about responses to what is seen and heard, and when basic skills of attentive listening and witnessing are employed, there ought to be no real bar to this happening where women are of course happy for this to take place. Adopting a feminist standpoint approach to research, combined with thoughts about intersectionality, allowed me to make sense of how difference could be understood and managed, and I would recommend a similar approach to other male researchers who are considering entering into the study of women's experiences of domestic violence.

Overall then, the methodology was successful in that it did enable a different kind of knowledge to emerge about how women experience and respond to domestic violence. It illuminated aspects that might have otherwise have remained vague and opaque, in particular the interweaving of physical space, the management of relationships, personal agency, and the construction of ideas about the self through time. The transitional stories that contained those elements emerged because the methodology gave space and time for women to work upon those ideas and formulate a response that made sense to them. The group-based approach enabled the coming together of women to share their thoughts and feelings and thus participation itself formed part of those transitional stories; in this way it can said that the methodology is of value if emancipation and empowerment is an aim of the research. I feel confident in saying that despite issues of recruitment and the small number of participants, the methodology and its supporting epistemology of embodiment and imagination is a sound one within the tradition of arts-based and new-paradigm research. It is also a methodology that if managed carefully, can provide useful insights into how women respond to and make sense of experiences of domestic violence. It can thus be considered a legitimate research methodology to employ alongside more established methodologies, where a more nuanced and imaginative response is required of participants or where a more engaged level of participation is required.

Finally, the methodology has been shown to be a good container for the epistemological issues identified in Chapter 3 that put forward a version of knowledge production that values imagination, embodiment and storytelling, at the same time as embracing the ambiguous, vulnerable and situated nature of that knowledge.

10 : Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the various strands contained within the exploration of visual representation of women's transitional stories of domestic violence and considers how they might be disseminated and developed further. Firstly though it is worth considering what has changed in the five years since beginning this research in terms of how domestic violence is understood and managed within the UK. The official definition (Home Office, 2013) of what constitutes domestic violence has been widened to now include acts of coercion and control, with a greater focus on emotional abuse, and a lowering of the age at which someone can be classed as being subject to domestic violence from 18 to 16 (Home Office, 2013). There has also been an expansion of the use of MARACs and an attempt to make domestic violence a criminal offence (Parliament UK, 2013). At the same time support services – both state funded and third sector – have been hit by fiscal constraints, and there continues to be a wide divergence in how different police forces deal with domestic violence (HMIC, 2014). In those five years, the prevalence of domestic violence has stayed the same and horrific stories of abuse, violence, and the failure of services to protect women, continue to appear. At the same time there has been a slow but steady reappearance of feminism as a popular discourse within mainstream media – led predominantly by online campaigners. The need then to understand domestic violence and its impact on women's lives is no less relevant now than it was when I started this study. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that making use of an arts-based methodology allows for the expression and representation of women's responses to the experience of domestic violence in a way that enables a different way of constructing knowledge about domestic violence, by bringing women's stories closer to the reader and through paying attention to the women's thoughts about their future.

10.2 Context and methodology revisited

The original focus of this argument was arrived at following my involvement with arts-based research with refugees and asylum seekers, my delivery of art therapy for women who had experienced domestic violence, an awareness of the need to be personally involved in tackling domestic violence, and a structured review of domestic violence literature. The review of literature demonstrated how different ways of researching and representing

knowledge of domestic violence could be framed as competing and overlapping stories (Hemmings, 2011, 2005; Haaken, 2010). The overarching theme identified within literature is that there is a range of competing stories and discourse, but with a movement towards understanding domestic violence from the perspectives of those who have experienced domestic violence. The stories that women told within this research show how academic discourses have only a marginal impact upon how individual women make sense of domestic violence, although it can be argued that they remain necessary in providing an academic structural understanding of domestic violence.

The outcome of looking at the literature as a set of competing discourses was the identification of a number of questions; questions that ask how and what an arts-based methodology might contribute to an understanding of domestic violence by allowing different forms of knowledge to emerge, and how it might enable different stories and voices to emerge than might ordinarily appear in other forms of data collection and analysis. The forms of knowledge sought include imagination and embodied responses to thoughts about the past, the present and the future. As part of the design of a suitable methodology that would help to answer those questions it became absolutely necessary to consider what the epistemological foundations of that methodology might be. Drawing upon Spinozian philosophy (Gatens, 2009; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002; Gatens & Lloyd, 1999), the point arrived at was to claim that imagination is both embodied and situated, and that its incorporation into narratives and stories allows for an empathic connection between teller and listener – or maker and viewer within the context of the visual arts - whilst acknowledging how imagination might also expose vulnerability (Murphy, 2012). The narrative-turn within contemporary academic disciplines formed part of this discussion, with both its advocates (Frank, 2010, 2005; Radley, 2009, 1993) and its critics (Atkinson, 1997) used to show its potential and limitations. Attention to individual biographies can close the gap between teller and audience, but runs the risk of being de-contextualised and of little value to sociological knowledge or political action. The idea of biographical narratives being without context is reflected within the consideration of how to evaluate arts-based methodologies, where the limited numbers of participants challenges the notion of generalizability and repeatability that marks out other kinds of methodologies. A response to those thoughts about the limitations of imagination and narrative is to focus upon how the stories told by women resonate with existing knowledge and existing experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Within the setting out of an epistemology, the development of a methodology, and during the discussion of participants' stories, the work of Brison (2002) and Frank (1995)

appears extensively. Their ideas of how narrative and story can be employed to remake the self and relational connections, following violent trauma and illness, form a strong thread within this thesis. What this thesis shows is that story has a similar restorative role to play within how women make sense of their experience of domestic violence and how they plan to continue moving away from it. It is this focus upon the movement away from domestic violence that draws attention to how women imagine their futures and to how that vision is, in turn, founded upon the past. It is this attention to the future, alongside the use of arts-based methods of data collection, which gives this thesis its unique quality and points to a different way of doing research.

Drawing upon the philosophies of imagination, embodiment and story, the methodology synthesises elements of ethno-mimesis (O'Neill, 2010, 2009), sensory and visual ethnography (Pink, 2009, 2007a), and feminist standpoint theory (Leavy, 2007; Harding, 2004, 1990). The main objective was to enable a way for women to use art materials to express their responses to domestic violence, in a form that allowed access to imaginative and sensory representations and that allowed for the appearance of thoughts about the future. Running alongside the desire to make women's responses visible was the desire to make participation safe via an ethics of care (Prosser, Clark & Wiles, 2008), an essential requirement within domestic violence research (Abrahams *et al*, 2004; Williamson, 2000). Equally, by being reflexively mindful of my own gender, and its potential impact upon dynamics of power and women's willingness to engage with the research (Beecham, 2009; Harding, 1998; Hearn, 1998), I ensured that I acted and communicated in a way that was attentive and non-judgemental. Despite some recruitment problems, a total of eight complete stories were produced by seven women; a number that, given the depth of disclosure within those stories, was of sufficient quantity to render the data meaningful (Baker & Rosalind, 2012) within the context of domestic violence research.

10.3 Recap of identified themes

Following the collection of words and images made by women within the groups, time was devoted to immersing myself in what had been recorded. Firstly, by approaching the data in a phenomenological and embodied way (Huss, 2013; Pink, 2007a; Stanczak, 2007); later, by grouping the stories together into themes and linking those back to literature about domestic violence, whilst drawing upon appropriate theory from elsewhere, in order to provide context and meaning (Radley, 2009) through the act of writing (Richardson & Pierre, 2005). The

themes that were identified were grouped into three areas labelled as: *escape and harmony*; *relationships and social support*; *agency and resistance*. Together, these themes form what I label *transitional stories of domestic violence.*

The first of those themes, *escape and harmony,* explored how women became aware of the effects of domestic violence upon them and how they were physically and emotionally moving away from those effects. The crucial element of this theme was how important to the sense of moving away from domestic violence everyday physical and domestic activities were for the women. Feelings of escape and freedom were mixed with feelings of ambivalence and doubt. That sense of ambiguity and uncertainty continues into the second theme identified within women's stories, *relationships and social support,* wherein attention shifts from the physical to the relational and shows how the women encountered and managed the relationships they had with friends, family and supporting services. Within this second theme, the gendered nature of social scripts about marriage, parenting and homemaker (Bradley, 2013; Pink, 2012, 2004; Dryden, 1999) is identified as being present within women's stories, although there is also evidence of resistance and challenge towards those scripts, wherein the women questioned the idea of being a perfect mother or took sole charge of the management of the home.

In that theme of relationships, a crucial finding is that where women feel that they have been listened to and included, their experiences of support services are far better than when they feel not listened to, or where decisions are made that exclude them. Identifying this need echoes previous research (Abrahams, 2010; Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2003). However, observing how it shaped women's own determination to regain control of their lives and gain access to children through the creation of a safe physical environment adds to the understanding of this need. From these observations it is clear that if women are to move away from domestic violence, rebuild their families and careers and so on. then they need to be better supported by all services and not just those that are specifically set up to support women experiencing domestic violence. Given the high cost of the long-term effects of domestic violence, any service or government policy needs to take account of its impact upon women's lives. Little has changed in how services are structured to suggest that this situation has changed since first conducting the research. Whilst the *Health and Social Care Act of 2012* (HMSO, 2012c) has not been implemented long enough to say how well an integrated approach to community safety and public health is responding to domestic violence, continued financial pressures upon state funded and third-sector services undermines attempts to form integrated responses. An example of how governmental

decisions can impact unwittingly upon women is the way in which the spare room tariff (what is commonly referred to as the 'bedroom tax') (HMSO, 2012b) makes the idea of creating a home fit for the potential return of children that much harder.

In *agency and resistance,* agency is taken as being the active and passive actions that women employ whilst living with domestic violence and after leaving (Campbell *et al* 1998; Lempert, 1996). The images of the tightrope walker, and of being at a cross-roads, emerged as powerful metaphors for how women, whilst attempting to exert agency over their lives and resist the effects of domestic violence, often felt uncertain about the choices already made and choices yet to be made. The women's sometimes limited and uncertain power over their lives, despite their concerted efforts of resistance, suggests that it is better to consider their actions to be tactics rather than strategies. As May (2013) explains, whilst strategies are employed by those with existing power in ways that visibly inhabit a cultural or physical space, tactics are employed by the less powerful, through less visible everyday actions and responses. In the stories told, the use of song lyrics (figure 7.1, for example) and references to everyday tasks associated with management of the home and parenting are closer to tactics than strategies, although this does not diminish their importance.

Just as in the first two themes, time also plays a crucial role in the third theme where the stories explored the women's attempts to give meaning to, and gain acceptance of, their pasts. The stories show that tactics and acts of resistance employed in the past continue into the present, and that the management of the relationship between the present self and the past self is as important to women as their relationship with the physical environment, with other people, and with support services. Elements of the relational self are thus divided by time. Domestic violence exacerbates the sense of uncertainty and chaos that comes about when that split is too great. What this theme shows though is that where women are able to tell their stories to others, and to have those stories witnessed and validated, this contributes to the sense of acceptance.

The research thus evidences that the visual element of women's stories aids the process of witnessing and validation, and therefore can be considered as an aid to the kind of empathic imagination that was espoused within the epistemology, outlined in Chapter 3, that underpins this thesis. It also evidences that within the study of domestic violence collective visual storytelling is itself a powerful form of agency and resistance. The value of arts-based research has been evidenced within the study of refuge and asylum (O'Neill, 2010, 2009), whilst the worth of paying attention to the sensory and embodied qualities of domestic and everyday life within ethnography has been clearly articulated (Pink, 2012, 2004). This thesis

has been able to demonstrate clearly that within the study of domestic violence an arts-based and embodied approach to knowledge does provide tangible insights into women's lived experience of how domestic violence impacts upon their everyday lives and plans for the future.

10.4 Further thoughts upon transitional stories

Together, the three identified themes form what I term *transitional stories of domestic violence*. Aspects of these transitional stories fit with existing knowledge of domestic violence to do with the impact upon physical health (Crisp & Stanko, 2001), mental health (Department of Health, 2003) and employment (Matjaskom Niolon & Valle, 2012), as well as aligning with other research that shows the power of the home and of being listened to (Abrahams, 2010, 2007), and of being able to create narrative meaning (Allen, 2012). What a transitional story allows for though, particularly where it is told visually, is the expression of those and other points from multiple perspectives and multiple points in time. It also gives shape to both memory and to imagination, and shows how the journey away from domestic violence is not a linear process, but rather one marked by moments of doubt and ambivalence, as well as moments of hope and joy; meaning that the active qualities of recovery and resistance (Barnes, 2013; Campbell, 1998) are thus strongly evident within transitional stories.

A crucial component of transitional stories is that their visual form enables the coalescence of time, space, body and emotion. Ideas of embodiment, emplotment and emplacement have been used to show how transitional stories, whilst being multi-layered, are also situated in particular experiences and locations. This aspect of transitional stories ties it into the epistemological arguments about the relations between body, mind and social space. The stories show how private and personal experiences are played out within physical environments, so that the disruption between the body and mind that is associated with violence (Brison, 2002) is manifested in women's relationship to their physical environment, but also to how management of that environment can assist the reformation of a coherent sense of self; a self that exists as a process of becoming and of returning.

In terms of how transitional stories relate to existing knowledge of domestic violence, what they reveal is how women are able to draw upon different discourses as they attempt to give meaning to their experiences, but with a relational discourse being the most prominent. They challenge the idea of there being a simple and singular way of understanding the

consequences of domestic violence; and whilst the research did not specifically aim to address the causes of domestic violence, I believe that there is just as likely to be the appearance of multiple meanings were a similar methodology applied to that question.

A feature to emerge late on in my understanding of transitional stories was the recognition that one way of thinking about the embodied qualities of everyday life is to make use of the idea of belonging; here taken to mean a sociological concept that brings together attention to political structures, cultural practices, physical space, corporeal experience and personal relationships (May, 2013). In one sense, belonging represents a closing of a loop in terms of my own engagement with arts-based research, given that my first real exposure to that methodology was during my participation in the *Making the Connections* and *Sense of Belonging* projects that explored the experience of migration and refuge (O'Neill, 2010). The notion of belonging within those projects was tied to concepts of community and safety, and drew heavily upon the power of shared visual stories to create meaning for participants and audiences. In a very similar way, transitional stories of domestic violence do the same: they express how and where women felt like they belonged and felt safe, whilst in their very making they generated a sense of belonging between participants. Although attention to political structures was limited, with it being something that I contributed after the stories had been told, those other elements that May (2013) identifies with belonging were directly addressed, particularly the physical and relational components of belonging. What transitional stories reveal is how domestic violence disrupts feelings of belonging, in the same way that political violence does. Just as domestic violence has been shown to disrupt and make vulnerable ideas about a coherent relational self (Brison, 2002), so too domestic violence disrupts and makes vulnerable feelings of belonging. Furthermore, what transitional stories of domestic violence clearly demonstrate is that the two elements of the relational self and belonging are intimately linked and equally affected by domestic violence.

10.5 Contributions to feminist praxis

As part of the development of the concept of transitional stories, feminist thought is used to consider the way in which such stories are gendered. Throughout this thesis feminist philosophies and epistemologies have been played a key role. Feminist thought has been used to think about the understanding of domestic violence from a structural perspective, as a way of understanding interlocking markers of power through the employment of ideas about intersectionality, as a justification for paying attention to women's lived experiences as a

legitimate form of knowledge, and finally as a driver for the need to be a reflexive researcher who pays attention to their gender. It is therefore necessary to ask what this thesis contributes to the development of feminist thought and action, or praxis.

As addressed within Chapter 2, feminism has many meanings and definitions, and is in a perpetual state of development. This thesis is far too limited in scope to do any justice to representing that diversity, but during the time of writing, feminism has regained popular currency, especially so within the space of online political activism. Some contemporary objectives for feminism include: critically understanding the role of women within Islam; challenging conceptions of sex work; developing equal rights for transgender people; pushing back against online sexism and misogyny; and identifying the effect upon women of post-2008 economics (Redfern & Aune, 2013). What continues to be an agenda is tackling violence against women and girls, but with a greater awareness that it is a complex phenomenon that crosses over into issues of faith, sexuality and the power of online media within the perpetuation and critique of misogynistic attitudes. Whilst the stories that women told do not address all of those particular components of contemporary feminism, they do have something to say about how the current economic climate is having an effect upon women's choices and experience of services, and that there continues to be structural and cultural pressures upon women's choices and options as they move away from domestic violence. On a more theoretical level, the stories contribute to thinking about embodied knowledge and imagination within contemporary feminist philosophy (Murphy, 2012; LeDoeuff, 2002) by showing that deliberately integrating those into research can enable a better understanding of women's responses to domestic violence and that an ethics of vulnerability and empathy can be an aid to political praxis. And whilst there is ambiguity in the stories, along with the appearance of vulnerability, these have aided empathy, visibility and the kind of feminist ontology that Murphy (2012) proposes, rather than pushing the women and their stories further towards the margins.

In terms of my position as a man researching women's experience of violence, I have been able to show that it is possible to be a man and actively engage with feminism and feminist methodologies. Like Hearn (1998) and Beecham (2009), I have identified that whilst the process is problematic, and requires great care and attention to how power might be manifested within the process of working with participants and making sense of their representations, it can be the case that men can engage meaningfully with research about violence against women. Being supported by organisations that specifically address violence against women, whilst employing a methodology that places women's standpoint at the

centre of knowledge production, assists this process. In fact I would state that it is essential that men do engage with researching women's experience of domestic violence and that they be prepared to be made vulnerable in the face of such knowledge. To do so does not discount the fact that men can also be the targets of domestic violence. The two phenomena are not mutually exclusive and I refute the idea that engaging with feminism, or paying attention to women's experience of domestic violence, is in some way dismissive of men's experience of domestic violence or blames all men for violence against women. Rather, it contributes to an understanding of the intersection of gender, power and violence that is of value to all.

This research thus contributes to contemporary feminist debates in a number of ways, and points to the potential of generating new areas of research and methodological design that integrates political action and imaginative ways of generating knowledge about gender and violence, whilst confirming the value of synthesising arts-based research with feminist thought and action (Leavy, 2007).

10.6 Dissemination strategy

This thesis has clearly shown that the synthesis of a feminist and arts-based approach to research offers a unique and valuable contribution to the understanding of domestic violence. As such it is important to outline how the findings from this novel approach can be widely disseminated to ensure that the distinctive qualities of the research are fully appreciated both within the field of domestic violence research but also more widely by those concerned developments within research design.

A driving principle behind the research was to produce knowledge that would be of benefit both for participants and for future audiences. The women were keen to have their stories shared with others in the belief that this would help and assist not only a broader understanding of how domestic violence impacts upon women, but also to give some hope to those women still living with violence. I asked women what they would want done with their stories – that went beyond conventional academic dissemination. Suggestions included producing posters for exhibition within community settings such as schools and libraries, as well as in discreet 'women only' spaces such as changing rooms within clothes shops. To my mind, there is an ethical imperative that I do disseminate the stories in ways that reach as broad an audience as possible, at the same time as acknowledging the potential for misinterpretation of misunderstanding that comes with presenting images out of context. However, as identified in Chapter 3, the ambiguity of images makes arts-based research

closer to being like a conversation between maker and audience than an 'error-free conclusion' (Eisner, 2008 cited in Rumbold, Fenner & Brophy-Dixon, 2012, p.70). Part of my role in the dissemination of the women's stories is to ensure that those stories are presented in ways that do justice to the women's experiences, and in ways that have enough contextual material to help frame those stories – especially the visual elements of those stories. To this end the following ideas form the starting point of an on-going dissemination strategy:

1. The transformation of this thesis into a single publication that is primarily academic in tone and targeted at those other researchers, activists and practitioners working within the field of domestic violence. The innovative methodology and the unique contribution made to the understanding of domestic violence deserve to be seen by such an audience in order to enhance how domestic violence is researched, understood and responded to. Such a publication would also be of value to other arts-based researchers looking for a unique example of where an arts-based methodology has been employed.

2. Extracting elements of this thesis for publication as journal articles, or chapters within edited volumes. Key elements are: the development and practice of an arts-based methodology, with a particular focus upon the role of reflexivity and the place of biographical futures within arts-based research; further expansion upon how arts-based methodologies and feminist research can be enhanced by an epistemology that is founded upon the synthesis of imagination, embodiment and story; and what the women's stories reveal about the importance of the physical home to ideas about agency, identity and belonging, with suggestions made about service improvement. There are likely other elements to be disseminated but these are primary ones as I see them at present. With these in mind relevant journals include: *Journal of Family Violence; Violence Against Women; Journal of Interpersonal Violence; Visual Studies; Feminist Review; Feminism & Psychology; The International Journal of Art Therapy; Arts in Health*. Many of these journals do not normally include visual imagery and so present a good opportunity to influence and inspire other researchers to embrace arts-based methods.

3. The presentation of women's stories and thoughts about the methodology at appropriate national and international conferences.

4. The production of a web-site that acts an interactive portal for the exploration of the women's stories. The multi-media element of web-enabled material, including hyper-text and layering would fit really well with the way in which the women's stories weave together different perspectives and points in time. If such a website could be linked to and from already established web-sites run by Women's Aid for example this would facilitate rapid dissemination to a very wide audience.

5. The production of posters (such as those at the close of this chapter), leaflets and small booklets, that could form the centre point of a programme of events to help educate and inform a range of audiences – from lay to professional – so as to raise awareness, change perception and influence policy and practice.

6. Starting a dialogue with organisations devoted to tackling domestic violence in order to explore how they might best make use of the women's stories. Such organisations include *Women's Aid*, *Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse* (CAADA) and *RESPECT*. An element of this is my recent appointment as a trustee for a local domestic violence agency, through which it will be possible to have some influence upon the way in which the findings of this research can be implemented.

7. The application for funding in order to enact the above plans; via the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for example.

In time, other dissemination opportunities will present themselves, but those presented above provide a good foundation to begin with. In the language of contemporary research, the overarching aim is to have demonstrable impact via knowledge exchange and inspiring public engagement. The visual elements are hugely powerful and will greatly help to make the dissemination process dynamic and engaging, thus assisting in the quality of the impact of dissemination.

10.7 Summary

Through the use of words and images, the transitional stories that women told add to the multiple lenses (Huss, 2013; Richardson, 2000) through which domestic violence can be viewed. By allowing for the appearance of imagination, and through giving attention to women's futures, those stories were given space to breathe (Frank, 2010) and be seen. By being interpreted as expressions of a desire to re-make the self (Brison, 2002) and achieve a sense of belonging (May, 2013) following domestic violence, they contribute to thinking through how women can be helped to transition away from domestic violence towards a

future that better aligns with their own desires. This research therefore positively contributes to the extensive body of knowledge that exists around domestic violence and of how best to support women leaving and moving away from domestic violence materially, structurally, and psychologically.

My contention is that this research goes a long way to showing that, within the context of domestic violence, the arts have value within academia and within the context of emancipatory politics. The value of the arts within these contexts has been hinted at within domestic violence literature (Hague & Mullender, 2005; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2002); whilst several examples of participatory arts engagement with domestic violence exist but with limited documentation (Speaking Out, 2014[20]; HOPE exhibition, 2012[21]). Here I have been able to systematically demonstrate that the arts have value for those women who have experienced domestic violence and for those who wish to respond to that experience better. I have also been able to show that feminist methodologies can be synthesised with arts-based methodologies and that it is possible for a man to engage meaningfully with feminist ideas within the context of researching women's experience of domestic violence.

The methodology has great potential to be employed elsewhere, for example within the study of young people's or children's experience of living with domestic violence, or to compare how men respond to and move away from domestic violence in relation to women's experiences. It would be fascinating to compare men's perception of the future and what holds importance for them after experiences of domestic violence. Do they have a different relationship with the physical space of the home and everyday domestic activities that might reflect wider masculinities? What would a re-made self or sense of belonging look like for men? How might men's thoughts about family and support differ from women's? The methodology's ability to access non-verbal and sensual knowledge opens up the potential to conduct similar research with those whose first-language or culture is different to the majority; something that this research hoped to address but was unable to do so due to recruitment problems. In a wider way, the methodology has value wherever there is a need to engage participants, researchers and audiences in an imaginative way or a wish to pay attention to the future of individuals and communities. And whilst the stories that the methodology generates are situated and partial (Leavy, 2007; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis,

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[20]

http://fd2d.com/articles/2013/12/transcending_the_trauma_of_gender_violence_creatively_exploring_empowering_responses_at_embrace_arts (last accessed 27/6/14)

[21] http://peopleexpress.cmhosts.net/?page_id=1105 (last accessed 27/6/14)

2002), in conjunction with other forms of knowledge, they can assist in the creation of authentic and stereoscopic knowledge (MacDougall, 2006; Richardson, 2000) that helps to imagine how society can be fairer and more equal.

Finally, in the spirit of participatory and emancipatory research, I wish to leave the reader with three images. They are a synthesis of objects and words created to aid the future dissemination of this research. Together they represent a powerful message about women's movement away from domestic violence, and a message that leaves room for the viewer and reader to enter into an imaginative dialogue with the images and words. They need no further commentary from me as they express very well the women's transitional stories of domestic violence.

Figure 10.1: Getting the confidence to just say goodbye

A place of me own you know what's just for me where I can relax. And that's maybe just in me mind.
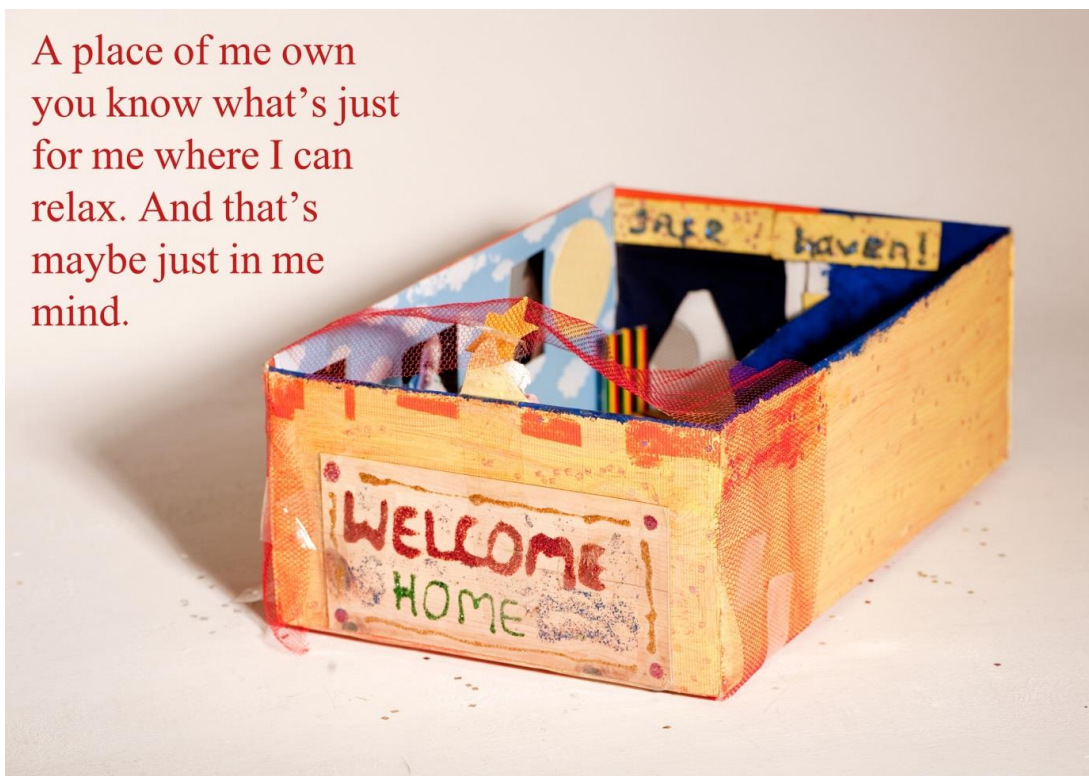
Figure 10.2: A place of me own

I couldn't move forward if I didn't look back

Figure 10.3: I couldn't move forward if I didn't look back

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Appendix 1

A. Text from information leaflet

Do you want to be creative and help to understand domestic violence and abuse better?

My name is Jamie Bird and I work at the University of Derby. I am developing and evaluating a way of using the arts to help better understand domestic violence and abuse. The study is based upon equality and community education. This means that anyone taking part will help to shape the focus of the research, and influence the way in which it can be used to educate communities about domestic violence.

A pilot group has already taken place. The kinds of things that were explored included thinking about the future, family, home, faith, making decisions and finding support.

Taking part in the study will involve attending twelve workshops, lasting 2 hours, using different art forms to aid the exploration of those things mentioned above as well as others that might be important. The kinds of art that may be used will include: painting, clay, collage and textiles, as well as drama. You do not have to be 'good' at art to take part.

As well as contributing to the research it is hoped that by taking part you will gain some personal benefits from being creative in a supportive environment.

The research is guided by a strong ethical approach, ensuring that everyone who takes part is kept safe.

The next few pages of this leaflet attempt to answer questions you might have about the project and the pilot-study.

If you feel that you would like to contribute in the way outlined, want to know more, or wish to make comments about the research project then please contact me by using the contact details below of by asking the person who gave you this invitation to pass a message onto me. The photographs in this leaflet are of objects made in past groups that I have worked with.

Questions & Answers

What is the study about?

The study is aiming to find out if the arts can contribute to what is known about domestic violence and abuse and to explore ways of using the arts to share that knowledge. It is hoped that the results of the research will contribute to how women are helped and increase awareness of domestic violence and abuse.

Why is the study important?

The study is important because whilst lots of research has been conducted with women who have experienced domestic violence, nearly all of it is based on interviews. Can the arts add something else to what is already known, or help to share the results of research in new ways?

What will happen in the workshops?

There will be twelve workshops. Each one will last approximately 2 hours and there will be a maximum of 6 people in the workshop. Different art-based activities will take place with a focus on exploring domestic abuse. When all of the workshops have been completed there will be a chance for you to provide feedback on what you thought about the workshops. Art materials and refreshments will be provided.

Where will the workshop take place?

The workshops will take place in a location that is both secure and confidential.

How will I give feedback at the end of the project?

The feedback will be given using a combination of a group discussion and personal interviews depending on your preference. The interviews can be conducted via telephone if required. The feedback will be recorded and typed up. You will be given a summary of the feedback to make further comments upon.

What will happen to the art work made in the workshops?

Photographs will be taken of the art work made. No photographs of you will be taken. The work can be kept safely by the researcher or you can choose to take the work away with you at the end of the workshops. Any art work that you decide not to keep will be respectively

disposed of after the project is completed.

Who else will see what is made in the workshops?

The study will be written about within academic journals and books. It is also likely that presentations about the work will be given at academic conferences. There is also the possibility of developing educational material using what has been made in the workshops.

What will I gain from taking part?

By taking part you will help contribute to the better understanding of domestic abuse. It is also hoped that you will develop some creative skills. Whilst the workshops are not therapy there may well be some positive benefits —things like improved self-esteem and well-being. Just being able to share your thoughts in a supportive group can be very beneficial. There might even be room to have some fun!

Do I need to be 'good' at art?

No. The aim is to use art as a way of sharing and exploring experiences. You just need to be willing to 'have a go' and that is all.

Do I need to be free from domestic violence to take part?

Whilst it is hard to say when someone might be 'ready' to take part in a study like this, it is best that you are not currently living within a violent or abusive person and that you have access to a good level of support from other people or organizations.

Can I decide to leave the study after I have started taking part?

At any time during or after the workshops you can choose to not take part anymore and to not have your contributions included in the study.

How will personal details be kept safe?

There will be no need to provide the researcher with any personal identifying details apart from a point of contact (which can be via a support worker). Any details that you do provide, as well as any art produced or feedback given, will be kept in a safe place at the University of Derby and destroyed after the project has been completed.

Who is organising the study?

Jamie Bird is designing and running the research. Jamie is a male lecturer at the University of Derby and an art therapist. This study builds on art-based projects where he has worked alongside refuges and women who have experienced domestic violence. Jamie is supported and supervised by researchers who have experience of investigating domestic violence and of using the arts to help people.

B. Copy of consent form

Consent form for arts-based research project

Thank you for volunteering to take part in this research project. This part of the project will last for twelve sessions and follows on from a pilot project that took place in the autumn of 2010. The aim of the project is to develop and evaluate a way of using the arts to help understand experiences of domestic violence, with an emphasis upon the present and the future as well as the past.

During the sessions we will be using a range of different art forms to help explore experiences of domestic violence with the final session providing an opportunity to give feedback about what you think worked and what didn't work.

You can choose to leave the project at any point. If you do decide to leave it would be helpful if you could let me know but you don't have to tell me why.

Anything made in the sessions will be kept safely and anonymously by myself and I can look after those things made until the end of the project. I would like to have photographs of anything made but I will not be photographing anybody in the group and I will always ask before taking photographs. During the final session, when giving feedback it may be necessary to make an audio recording of any group discussion – but this will be negotiated. As with all research of this kind where issues of concern arise that relate to child protection I will be obliged to take that information further. The things that you make and the words spoken may appear within academic and educational material (articles, chapters, conference presentations, websites) but these will always be made anonymous.

The accompanying leaflet attempts to answer some of the questions that you might have about taking part in the project. If you have any other questions at any point please do speak to me in person or use the contact details below.

If you are comfortable with taking part in this project could you please indicate your consent by completing the accompanying form.

Thank you again for considering taking part in this project.

Consent form

The Arts as an Aid to Documenting and Representing Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence

Jamie Bird, University of Derby

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I understand that where issues relating to child protection arise this information will have to be passed onto North Derbyshire Women's Aid.

☐

I understand that any photographs, recordings or transcripts will be made anonymous and kept safely at the University of Derby.

☐

I understand that what I make and what I say may appear within academic and educational material (articles, chapters, conference presentations, websites) but these will always be made anonymous.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Please tick box

	Yes	No
I agree to the photographing of things made but I also have the option to change my mind. Any photographs will be made anonymous.	☐	☐
I agree that an audio recording of the feedback session may be made and a transcript produced with contributions made anonymous.	☐	☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant
(First name only)   Date   Signature / Initials

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature