'THERE WAS A BRICK WALL, AND THERE WAS THE OCEAN': STORIES
OF SURVIVING CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE

by

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Statements and Declarations

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Abstract

For too long, research has described children as passive and damaged witnesses to physical violence who are at risk of reproducing intergenerational domestic abuse. Considering this research, I was curious about whether survivors themselves would describe their experiences in this way. I began to wonder how survivors made sense of their experiences, what influenced their interpretations, and what this might mean for how they respond to domestic abuse in their childhoods.

Although research has recently begun to explore children's first-hand accounts of domestic abuse, often the safeguards needed to conduct interviews with children preclude the participation of those young survivors who continue to live in situations of domestic abuse, as well as those who never contact counselling services or shelters. The absence of these stories may exclude children with more developed coping strategies, and those who are less adversely affected by their experiences and therefore do not require professional intervention. To ethically include these unexplored stories, I interviewed adult survivors about their retrospective accounts of childhood domestic abuse. Specifically, this study examined how adult survivors describe and interpret childhood experiences of domestic abuse perpetrated by father figures against mothers.

To avoid reproducing research that labelled survivors as passive and damaged witnesses to domestic abuse, I used a feminist intersectional approach to recognise domestic abuse as an act of power and control, and to allow for the diversity of survivors' experiences to emerge. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, I invited survivors to discuss the aspects of their experiences they deemed to be most important. I conducted 19 interviews with survivors, and analysed these using a combination of thematic and narrative structural analysis.

In contrast to previous research, the results of this study demonstrated that survivors experienced an everyday alertness to the threat of abuse. Perpetrators were experienced as omnipresent through survivors' relational experiences of coercive control. Despite surviving daily in this oppressive environment, survivors continually engaged in actions that mitigated and resisted the perpetration of abuse. Experiences of intersecting oppressive forces such as class, race and the status of children

compounded and diversified survivors' experiences and limited how survivors could enact resistance.

This research incorporates into the childhood domestic abuse literature a broader explanation of how young people experience and respond when living with domestic abuse that is inclusive of tactics of coercive control. It is clear from these findings that care must be taken in both research and practice to recognise children's strengths as a way of building their sense of resilience. Acknowledging how survivors of childhood domestic abuse actively respond, resist and cope when living with domestically abusive fathers can work to achieve this aim. Furthermore, understanding the different ways in which oppressive social structures such as adultism, classism, racism, ageism and gender systems compound children's experiences and limit their responses to domestic abuse has critical implications for the development of social policies that affect children.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: _____

Date: 24th October 2019

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Chapter 1.   Introduction

Across the world, the experience of domestic abuse is an everyday reality for many children. Although there has been a surge of research in recent years about childhood domestic abuse, only a small percentage of these studies have focused on survivors' subjective experiences when living with violent fathers. It is even more uncommon to find studies examining what children do when living with domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Hague, Harvey & Willis, 2012; O'Brien, Cohen, Pooley, & Taylor, 2013; Överlien, 2010). It is far more likely for research to be concerned with how exposure to domestic abuse harms children's development. Studies about childhood domestic abuse in Australia are even more scarce (Noble-Carr, McArthur, & Moore, 2017). This study responds to this gap in the research by reporting on a project that elicited first-hand accounts of adult experiences of and responses to childhood domestic abuse in Australia.

This chapter begins by clarifying the terms and definitions in use throughout the thesis. In defining these terms, I make transparent the feminist stance adopted in this study. I then elaborate on the reasons for my decision to undertake this research. Developing this rationale, I touch on the prevalence of childhood domestic abuse and explore the impact of these experiences on children and young people. I then offer some personal reflections on my experiences as a social work practitioner working with childhood domestic abuse survivors. I draw on this experience to highlight an incongruence between the portrayal of children in the professional literature and how they often presented to me in a therapeutic setting.

Given this dissonance, I argue that there is a need for increased social work research about this topic, and on children's experiences of trauma more generally. The chapter concludes by stating the research question, as well as the aims and objectives that guide the study, before describing how I have structured this thesis to achieve its purposes.

1.1 TERMS

When setting out to write about any topic, it is essential to consider the use of language (Murray & Powell, 2009). This is particularly important when naming and framing domestic abuse, because what is made visible and what is rendered invisible hinges on the definition chosen (Kelly, 1988a; Murray & Powell, 2009). Morris (2009, p. 424) states that women and children's everyday experiences need to be "excavated and languaged" before they can gain "legitimacy and visibility". Itzin (2000, p. 357) extends this argument by suggesting that how domestic abuse is framed directly affects "what is and is not done about it through policy and practice". Thus, the terms that are used to describe domestic abuse are essentially an initial step in the process of affecting change in how and when domestic abuse is recognised (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). Given the importance of language, the next few paragraphs specifically describe what I am referring to when I use the terms 'domestic violence', 'childhood domestic abuse', 'perpetrator' and 'survivor'.

1.1.1 Domestic Violence

The power of language to inform change is evident in feminist campaigning that bought awareness to the issue of domestic violence. As a result of such advocacy, the terminology used to describe domestic abuse has undergone many changes in Australia over the past two decades (Murray & Powell, 2009). Feminists were the first to locate domestic violence in language that highlights it as a gendered social problem (Murray & Powell, 2009). This shift in framing solidified a place for domestic abuse on political agendas in the 1980s (Murray & Powell, 2009; Stark, 2007, 2009a). The influence of feminism remains detectable in current policies that continue to adopt a gendered analysis of domestic abuse by linking the issue to the inequality of women (Murray & Powell, 2009).

In addition to viewing domestic violence through a sociological lens, feminist perspectives have been instrumental in developing a sophisticated understanding of domestic abuse as a series of patterned and repeated behaviours with roots in power and control (Laing & Humphreys, 2013; Murray & Powell, 2009; Stark, 2007, 2009a). By illuminating the underlying issues of power and control, feminism effectively displaced physical abuse as the central experience of domestic abuse, and instead

highlighted the cumulative and compounding effect of non-physical violence, such as the use of coercive control. Almeida and Durkin (1999, p. 313) capture the centrality of coercive control in the operation of domestic abuse in the following definition:

> Domestic violence is the patterned and repeated use of coercive and controlling behaviour to limit, direct, and shape a partner's thoughts, feelings and actions. An array of power and control tactics is used along a continuum in concert with one another. These tactics include physical abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, threats and intimidation, isolation and entrapment, sexual abuse and exploitation, control and abuse of children and isolation through job relocation and language barriers.

This definition makes explicit how tactics of abuse are not individual or episodic occurrences of physical violence, and instead reveals domestic abuse as indicative of a context of ongoing abuse, the effects of which can be subtle and cumulative.

When I use the term 'domestic abuse' or 'intimate partner violence' throughout this thesis, I refer to Almeida and Durkin's (1999) definition of domestic violence. However, in a slight departure from Almeida and Durkin's (1999) wording, I adopt the term 'domestic abuse' in preference to 'domestic violence'. I use this terminology to deliberately step away from the invitation to centralise physical violence as a key tactic and to further highlight the subtle and insidious actions involved in the perpetration of the use of coercive control that is more characteristic of women's experiences of domestic abuse (Stark, 2007).

I also use the term 'intimate partner violence' interchangeably with domestic abuse in the following chapters. I use 'intimate partner violence' when I want to differentiate between children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse and adults' experiences of abuse in intimate partner relationships. I also use a subtly different definition of domestic abuse when I refer to childhood domestic abuse, as described in the next section.

1.1.2 Childhood Domestic Abuse

While Almeida and Durkin's (1999) definition includes abuse of children, it decentralises children as subjects and includes them more as objects weaponised by perpetrators. In light of this, it is useful, when thinking about children's experiences of domestic abuse, to be mindful of the NCRVAWC (2009, p. 186) definition, which states:

> the central element of 'domestic violence' is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling one's partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. […] In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.

This definition is less specific than Almeida and Durkin's (1999), but it includes children as direct targets of abuse by perpetrators.

While I argue that it is critical that children are centralised in a definition of childhood domestic abuse, I also believe that to fully understand childhood domestic abuse the definition must capture the impact that perpetrators have on children's relationships. Morris (2009, p. 417) takes the process of defining domestic abuse a step further by detailing it as an 'abusive household gender regime' (AHGR). Morris explains her concept of an abusive household gender regime as follows:

> The web of interlocking practices and tactics of violence and abuse creates the fabric of the AHGR, in which violence towards women and children is interwoven through time and intimate space into their daily lives, into their bodily and emotional reactions, into their beliefs and into their relationships with themselves and others. The repetitive and patterned ways in which power and gender are enacted and the discursive forms they take all contribute to this web of entrapment.

Morris's (2009) definition centralises children's experiences as abuse that occurs within households, and incorporates the repetitive and interlocking patterns of abuse. This definition also incorporates the way in which domestic abuse – its effects endured daily – seeps into every aspect of their lives, including relationships. These nuances in the description give depth to the understanding of domestic abuse and provide a broader lens through which to view children's experiences. It is for this reason that, when I use the term childhood domestic abuse, I incorporate Morris's (2009) concept of an abusive household gender regime.

I acknowledge that the term 'childhood domestic abuse' is not ideal because 'domestic' alludes to the operation of abuse as something that only occurs in the home. However, domestic abuse is not confined to the home environment and is very frequently a feature during the post-separation period (Humphreys, Houghton & Ellis, 2008; Laing & Humphreys, 2013; Pitman, 2010). Furthermore, I recognise that the term 'family violence' is preferable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for its recognition of the complexity of factors that contribute to the violence experienced in Indigenous communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2007; Gevers & Goddard-Jones, 2003). However, 'family violence' has also become more recognisable as a term used by those who adhere to the family violence perspective (Gelles 1985; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980), and I sought to align this research more transparently with a feminist perspective.

1.1.3 Perpetrators

The decision to avoid allying this research with the family violence perspective ties into a much larger debate relating to gender parity. The issue of gender parity is a bitter and contested one (Laing & Humphreys, 2013) and it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed analysis here. I would like to acknowledge from the outset that some women are violent towards their male partners and that domestic abuse is an equally important social issue in same-sex relationships. However, abuse in intimate relationships (ABS, 1996, 2017; AIHW, 2019) and, more broadly, of violence in society as a whole, is overwhelmingly and predominately perpetrated by men (ABS, 2017; AIHW, 2019; Noble-Carr et al., 2017).

Recently, research from family violence theorists challenges this pattern and asserts that women are equally as violent as their male counterparts (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Nearly all of this evidence is based on studies that employ various versions of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS, Straus, 1979). However, the CTS has been heavily critiqued for its emphasis on physical acts of violence taken out of the context of the operations of power inherent in intimate relationships (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). Furthermore, the findings of earlier versions of this psychometric test skewed gender parity results even further by excluding incidents of sexual abuse from its measures (Dobash et al., 1992).

Regardless of the shortcomings of the CTS, the debate about gender symmetry continues to rage regarding how often men or women engage in intimate partner physical abuse. However, even if the debate about gender symmetry in domestic abuse is set aside, there remains a great deal of evidence showing that men and women perpetrate domestic abuse in significantly different ways. Even Gelle and Straus (1999, p.424), the principal developers of the CTS and proponents of the family violence perspective, have cautioned against misinterpretation of the data produced in these surveys, stating:

> Unfortunately, the data on wife-to-husband violence have been misreported, misinterpreted, and misunderstood. Research uniformly shows that about as many women hit men as men hit women. However, those who report that husband abuse is as common as wife abuse overlook two important facts. First, the greater average size and strength of men and their greater aggressiveness means that a man's punch will probably produce more pain, injury, and harm than a punch by a woman. Second, nearly three-fourths of the violence committed by women is done in self-defence. While violence by women should not be dismissed, neither should it be overlooked or hidden. On occasion, legislators and spokespersons like Phyllis Schlafly have used the data on violence by wives to minimize the need for services for battered women. Such arguments do a great injustice to the victimization of women.

Other studies supportive of the gender symmetry debate have also reported differences between men and women's use of violence. For example, Mirrlees-Black (1999), who found similar rates of assaults on men and women, also argued that these rates did not automatically suggest equal *victimisation* of men and women. Instead, Mirrlees-Black (1999) found that men who experienced violence were less upset, less frightened, less injured and less likely to seek medical assistance for injuries sustained.

According to Humphreys and Mullender (2000), more severe and damaging acts of violence continue to characterise abuse directed by men at women. Given the differences in the way men and women engage in domestic abuse and the inconsistencies in gender parity, I decided in this study to focus specifically on experiences of childhood domestic abuse where fathers or father figures were the main antagonists. In addition to determining the perpetrators, I also had to clarify my positioning of those who had experienced childhood domestic abuse.

1.1.4 Survivors

The most common labels employed in the professional literature to describe those who live with domestic abuse are 'victim' or 'survivor'. In this thesis, the term 'survivor' has been used to describe the participants who contributed to this study and others who have lived or continue to live with domestic abuse. Liz Kelly's (1988b) work with women who experienced sexual violence inspired me to use the term 'survivor' as a way of acknowledging the strength and resilience of participants. For Kelly (1988b), the term 'survivor' provides an opportunity to emphasise participants' actions and responses, as well as to recognise their experiences of victimisation. The term 'survivor' stands in stark contrast to 'victim', a term synonymous with occasions of injury or death (Young & Maguire, 2003). According to Young and Maguire (2003), 'victim' carries a sense of injustice, and is suggestive of a lack of control or agency inherent in the process of victimisation. Victimisation is the objectification of a person which re-defines experiences by establishing new standards for categorising their experiences; these standards dismiss any question of will, and deny the person the status of "being a living, changing, growing and interactive person" (Barry, 1979 p. 18). The construction of the passive victim has the potential to stigmatise people who have experienced violence by emphasising their vulnerability and helplessness (Jordan, 2013).

As discussed in the next chapter, the bulk of the literature on children and domestic abuse has tended to engage in the victimisation of young people who live with domestic abuse. To avoid falling into the trap of subjectifying young people in this way, I have positioned the participants in this study as people who continue to live and cope despite their experiences of adversity. My choice to adopt this stance regarding survivors of domestic abuse is influenced by how I came to undertake this study and by the rationale that underpinned that decision.

1.2   BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon. The World Health Organisation (2013, p. 35) describes it as a "global health problem of epidemic proportions". As many as a third of all women have experienced physical or sexual assault at the hands of an intimate partner (World Health Organisation, 2013).

Australia is not exempt from this violence. A personal safety survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2017) revealed that one in five women report being victims of domestic violence. These prevalence rates have a significant effect on the health and wellbeing of Australian women, with figures showing that 1.4 per cent of disease experienced by adult women can be attributed to physical or sexual abuse by a former or current intimate partner (Ayre, Lum On, Webster, Gourley, & Moon, 2016). Congruently, Vic Health (2004) claims that violence is one of the most significant risk factors for the health and wellbeing of women of reproductive age.

The deaths of women at the hands of current or former partners is one of the most significant risks that women who live with domestic abuse face. Studies show that women are at increased risk of homicide resulting from domestic abuse (Bryant & Bricknell, 2017). Statistics show that between 2008 and 2010, a total of 89 women died as a result of the violent actions of domestically abusive men (Chan & Payne, 2013). Between 2014–15 and 2015–16, the National Homicide Monitoring Program recorded 218 domestic homicide victims (AIHW, 2019). More than half (59%, or 129) of these victims were female and 64% (82) of these female victims were killed by an intimate partner (AIHW, 2019). The popular press has characterised these statistics as revealing a 'war on women' (Bindel, 2018). However, figures accounting only for criminal acts are not the most useful indicator of the extent of domestic abuse.

Statistics drawn from criminal justice agencies and organisations are insufficient for gauging the number of families living in domestically abusive homes. Criminal justice sources are reliant on domestic abuse coming to the attention of authorities, but there are many stages in the progression from the time a woman first experiences abuse to the eventual charging of a perpetrator, and only a few of these instances result in conviction (Cox, 2015). An analysis by the National Research Organisation for Women's Safety of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey reveals that of the 814,100 most recent domestic physical assaults identified by women, only 118,700 were known by the victims to have resulted in formal charges (Cox, 2015).

A similar pattern exists for sexual assaults, with only six per cent of perpetrators of sexual assault by a male cohabiting partner resulting in the victim being aware of the perpetrator answering to charges in court (Cox, 2015). This indicates that most physical and sexual assaults perpetrated by cohabiting partners go unreported and often those that are reported do not result in charges. In light of these findings, it seems

remiss to assume that figures based on criminal justice outcomes provide a full picture of domestic abuse. A Senate Committee report into domestic violence in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015) found the reliance on criminal justice data and the scarcity of prevalence data to be a nation-wide problem. These issues with data indicate the difficulty in accurately determining how widespread the issue of intimate partner violence is. However, while it is difficult to get a precise picture of the prevalence of adult domestic abuse, it is even more difficult to achieve clarity on how many children may be experiencing domestic abuse.

1.2.1 Prevalence of Childhood Domestic Abuse

Identifying children and young people's experiences has proven even more elusive than those of adults (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2016). A report by the Council of Australian Government (COAG, 2016) identified a lack of data on child victims, and described the available data relating to children and young people as "inadequate". What we do know is that around 2.5 million adults experience physical and/or sexual abuse before they turn 15 years of age (ABS, 2017). More often than not, a parent is the perpetrator of the physical abuse children experience (ABS, 2017). Further evidence of the prevalence of childhood domestic abuse can be drawn from homelessness statistics that indicate that during the year 2017-2018 a total of 22 percent (26 500) clients in need of specialist homelessness services due to domestic abuse were children aged 0-9 (AIHW 2019). These figures give some indication of the magnitude of childhood domestic abuse. However, the strongest indicator of prevalence is derived from the number of children who are recorded as being in the care of adult victims at the time of intimate partner violence.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2017) report that 418,000 women and 92,200 men who had experienced violence from a previous partner said the children in their care had also viewed this violence. Correspondingly, the 2016 COAG report found that approximately three in four women, who had experienced intimate partner violence, stated that they believed that the children in their care either saw or heard domestic violence. Theise figures are helpful in gauging how many children may experience domestic abuse but, like much of the research about childhood domestic abuse, these figures are reliant on adults perceptions of children's experiences rather than the first-hand accounts of young people themselves.

Indemaur (2001) conducted one of the few studies that has canvased young people directly to determine the rates at which they witnessed domestic abuse. This early population-based survey of 5000 young people indicated that nearly 25 per cent of Australian young people had witnessed their mother physically assaulted by a male partner; the rate rose to 42 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Indermaur, 2001). In light of the existing statistics, Bartels (2010) suggests that it is reasonable to expect that Australian young people are present in approximately 44 per cent of all reported cases of family violence. The emerging prevalence of children's exposure to domestic abuse has prompted research that seeks to understand the impact of childhood exposure to such abuse.

1.2.2 Impacts of Domestic Abuse on Children

During the 1990s, the risks arising from childhood exposure to domestic abuse appeared in the academic literature (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). During this time, the conceptualisation of and empirical research on domestic abuse flourished (Ai & Park, 2005). Longitudinal, meta-analytic and population-based studies have focused primarily on investigating the impacts of domestic violence on children (Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2016). These research endeavours became the foundation of a comprehensive body of knowledge that detailed the negative impact of domestic abuse on the health and wellbeing of child witnesses (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). As a result of previous research, it is now well documented that domestic abuse is a serious problem for children and young people that carries significant risks to their long-term health and wellbeing (Georgsson, Almqvist & Broberg, 2011; Laing, 2000; Överlien, 2012a; Richards, 2011). Advances in understanding post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological and physiological conditions have led to developments in clinical responses for those who have experienced childhood domestic abuse (Ai & Park, 2005). Framing domestic abuse as trauma has assisted in validating the psychological injury suffered by survivors, and has led to interventions that have reduced trauma symptoms (Anderson, 2010). Through this process, the seriousness of the victimisation of children that results from living with domestic abuse has gained significant recognition (Anderson, 2010). However, this recognition has also brought the unintended consequence of reinforcing a victim discourse surrounding children.

1.2.3 A Social Work Perspective

Alternative stories of agency and resistance currently lie outside the dominant story of childhood domestic abuse (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Danis, 2006). To access these stories, alternative methodologies to the positivist procedures employed in this field are required. Social work research can provide an alternative viewpoint on the study of childhood domestic abuse. The underlying principles of the social work profession make it well suited to researching childhood domestic abuse. For example, social work operates at the interface between people and their environments (AASW, 2015; Healy, 2005) and as such holds the potential to incorporate a more contextual interpretation of children's experiences.

The profession of social work is concerned with the multiple and intertwining levels of individual, family, relationships, community and broader social context (AASW, 2015) which can allow the development of greater awareness of how domestic abuse operates on a relational level. For these reasons, social work research is well placed to shed light on how individuals make meaning of their experiences of domestic abuse. Finally, the discipline of social work is grounded in a strong value base, a commitment to individuals and social justice, and to the goal of effecting change (Smith, 2012). These principles of social work underpin the aims and objectives of this study.

1.3   AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

This research provided a unique opportunity for adult survivors to narrate their childhood experiences of domestic abuse in a way that allowed for the emergence of stories of survival. The impetus for conducting this study was my experience as a social work practitioner engaging therapeutically with children and young people living with, or recovering from, the experience of living with family violence. As a practitioner, I found it difficult to find literature that reflected the resourcefulness of the young people with whom I was working. Instead, I encountered literature that categorised children by what was wrong with them, or what might go wrong with them because of 'witnessing' domestic 'violence'.

There were three clear discrepancies between the literature and my practice experience. First, the children I worked with appeared to have positive attributes that

were absent from professional publications about them. Professional literature, heavily influenced by developmental psychology, characterised young people in terms of deficits (Mullender et al., 2002). Second, children's stories I was hearing as a practitioner were alive with actions demonstrating that they were far from passive in the face of domestic abuse. Instead, they were highly involved family members, who were active in dealing with the adversities and opportunities encountered as a result of their relationships with domestically violent fathers. They were not simply 'witnesses' or children 'affected by' domestic abuse – they were centrally located and active social agents in their lives. Third, children's experiences of domestic abuse were diverse and heavily influenced by their status as children, as well as by other forms of social stratification. Often the diversity that resulted from these varying social locations and their corresponding systems of oppression were ignored, and children's experiences instead became homogenised.

I do not mean to deny in any way the importance of validating the pain and damage of domestic abuse; however, I felt that the literature was doing a disservice to young people by not presenting an alternative view to their well-documented victimisation. Considering this, my initial intention was to design a participatory research project with young people to explore how they navigated experiences of childhood domestic abuse. However, as I explain further in the next chapter, it was not possible to conduct ethical research into the topic in a way that was inclusive of a range of childhood experience with this age group. As a result, I chose to use a retrospective research design that included adults who had experienced childhood domestic abuse. This change in my research focus provided a unique opportunity to gain insight into how childhood experiences shaped adults' ideas about their present lives.

Using a narrative analysis methodology (Polkinghorne, 1996), this qualitative research project created a space for adult participants to step into the role of the central protagonist in their stories. Despite not engaging directly with children, this work is committed to the principles that underpin the new sociology of childhood (Christensen & Prout, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 2015; Prout & James, 1997). As such, this research is conducted from a standpoint that recognises children

as socially active beings, capable of making sense and affecting change in their families and communities. I also recognise that children occupy a range of different social locations that impact their experiences of and contribute to the production of unique and varied stories of childhood domestic abuse. These theoretical commitments were inherent in the central research question and aims of this study.

1.3.1 Research Question and Aims

The study sought to answer the following research question:

How do adult survivors describe and interpret their childhood experiences of domestic abuse perpetrated by father figures against mothers?

There were four specific objectives in investigating this question. These were to:

1. Provide an opportunity for survivors of childhood domestic abuse to give first-hand accounts of their everyday experiences of living with domestic abuse.

2. Gain insight into how participants describe and interpret their actions and responses to living with domestic abuse that includes coercive control.

3. Gain insight into how experiences of domestic abuse differ across the category of 'childhood'.

4. Contribute to the body of knowledge that informs the understanding of how young people experience and respond to all aspects of domestic abuse, including non-physical abuse and coercive control.

1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The thesis begins with a review of the literature that has informed the current understanding of childhood domestic abuse. The review tracks the study of childhood domestic abuse and analyses the exploration of this topic. In doing so, gaps in research are brought to the fore which signal a need for a more in-depth analysis of how young people experience and respond to childhood domestic abuse.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how using an intersectional approach, teamed with a narrative methodology, with adult survivors of childhood domestic abuse can address some of the identified gaps in the current literature, and highlight how varying social locations and experiences of oppression produce unique and nuanced experiences of domestic abuse.

Chapter 4 is the first findings chapter and shows how childhood domestic abuse is experienced relationally. Participants' experiences are situated with a relational context that includes associations between immediate families, peer connections and broader social supports. Chapter 5 outlines the prominent narrative themes that provide insight into adult survivors' experiences of childhood domestic abuse. The chapter explores experiences of seeing, hearing and feeling domestic abuse, before drilling down into how participants experience domestic abuse as an ongoing and pervasive context of power and control. Chapter 6 focuses more specifically on the types of responses and resistances that survivors enacted during their childhoods. Chapter 7 is the final findings chapter in which I show how turning points in narratives connect with the use of protective and oppositional strategies to produce a shift in how childhood domestic abuse is understood and responded to.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the main findings in light of the current literature. I propose a refined model of childhood domestic abuse that incorporates children's experiences of coercive control. I argue that this model is more representative of children's holistic experiences and provides new insight into the varied ways that children experience domestic abuse. Constructing a more in-depth model of the diversity inherent in children's experiences of domestic abuse also sheds light on the variety of methods children use to both respond to and resist the perpetration of abuse. I then discuss how, through this broader lens of understanding children's experiences, new ways of recognising children as active social agents who engage in innovative and creative strategies of survival are revealed.

I close this thesis with a short concluding chapter in which I outline the implications for practice and policy and the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for further research on this subject.

Chapter 2.   Literature Review

While a great deal is known about many aspects of family, domestic and sexual violence, there are several gaps in the knowledge base that need to be filled to present a comprehensive picture of its extent and impact in Australia. In particular, there is limited information on children in this context, including their attitudes, the prevalence of abuse, the totality of their experiences, and outcomes (AIHW, 2019). Estimates suggest that more than one million Australian children are currently surviving experiences of domestic abuse (The Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2011). These figures indicate the need for a better understanding of this issue to inform strategies aimed at preventing and responding to childhood domestic abuse. Therefore, one of the main tasks of this chapter is to present the current state of knowledge in the field.

Bodies of knowledge in research are essentially collections of stories. These stories, when taken together, construct particular narratives. In the case of the study of childhood domestic abuse, well-established narratives about children and domestic abuse have merged to form a metanarrative that positions children as passive and damaged witnesses to physical abuse. In line with the goals of the feminist intersectional approach, this literature review moves beyond synthesising current knowledge by incorporating a critical analysis of the construction of 'the child' in research and how these underlying premises have shaped the current evidence base. In doing so, I critically analyse the existing body of knowledge and challenge how children's experiences are portrayed in academic literature. I argue that a new way forward is needed to pave a way for gathering and reporting stories of childhood domestic abuse.

To examine the knowledge base about childhood domestic abuse, I drew literature from a targeted peer review search of eight databases: Sociological Abstracts, ProQuest, PsychInfo, Pubmed, Social Service Abstracts, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect. I conducted searches based on all possible combinations of the terms "domestic", "violence",

"intimate partner violence", "child", "exposure" and "witness". Reference lists of identified papers were further cross-referenced to find additional relevant studies that did not emerge during the database search. Given the relatively short history of the research about childhood domestic abuse, I chose not to restrict searches by date. This decision was made to ensure the inclusion of historical and seminal works related to childhood domestic abuse as these studies set the research tradition within the field. The search initially yielded more than 1000 articles. Abstract and bibliographic information was used to identify material that met the review inclusion criteria. I excluded articles in which the focus was on neglect or abuse of children occurring outside the context of domestic abuse, articles that researched intimate partner violence between young people, and research related to violence perpetrated against parents by children. This chapter makes use of information from this literature search in the following structure.

Section 1, *Examining the Childhood Domestic Abuse Evidence Base*, is an outline of the knowledge related to childhood domestic abuse. By synthesising the main bodies of knowledge, this section not only examines what is currently known but also how this knowledge is generated through research.

Section 2, *Constructions of Children in Domestic Abuse Literature*, undertakes a critical reading of the existing literature to show how research orientations in the field frame children as passive and dependent non-adult figures. In this section, I argue that an overreliance on deterministic models of socialisation in childhood domestic abuse studies has positioned children in ways that underestimate or ignore their agency and cast them as passive, damaged and dangerous victims of domestic abuse.

In Section 3, *Children as Active Social Agents in an Everyday Context of Abuse*, I review the literature in a way that highlights the need to recognise childhood domestic abuse as a complex and pervasive experience in which children are actively and relationally engaged. This section shines a spotlight on how research about children and domestic abuse draws on a limited definition of domestic abuse. I argue that these definitional limitations reduce the visibility of children's experiences and actions. From this position, I explore how research situating childhood domestic abuse in interpretative research orientations offers the field more nuanced ways of recognising children as actively engaged in homes affected by domestic abuse.

Section 4, *New Possibilities for the Study of Childhood Domestic Abuse*, is the final section. Here, attention is drawn to the absence of children's diverse experiences of childhood domestic abuse from the academic literature. This omission can be attributed, in part, to a failure of the current body of research to consider the effects of the social locations and systems of oppression in which children are located. The section highlights how the current body of literature limits the examination of the types of abuse children endure when living in violent families. In conclusion, I suggest that people who have experienced childhood domestic abuse are active agents who can provide experiential, in-depth and holistic accounts of their diverse experiences.

2.1   EXAMINING THE CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE EVIDENCE BASE

The purpose of this section is to synthesise the main findings of the current childhood domestic abuse knowledge base. Studies about children and domestic abuse began to appear in the literature in the mid-20th Century. Using this period as a pivotal temporal marker reveals that published studies have tended to privilege classical experimental models and their associated quantitative paradigms (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Joseph, Govender & Bhagwanjee, 2006; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). Reviewing this literature through a historical lens shows how, over time, dominant stories that stand as normative have risen to the surface to inform a metanarrative about children and their experiences of domestic abuse. A critical analysis of the history of the literature also unveils the marginalisation of some crucial stories as a result of specific research orientations. What becomes clear in this review is that the persistent positivist research focus that underpins this area of study predominantly reports the harmful effect that domestic abuse has on children and their development (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Georgsson, Almqvist & Broberg, 2011a; Mullender et al., 2002; Noble-Carr et al., 2017; Överlien, 2010).

2.1.1 The Positivistic Research Tradition of Childhood Domestic Abuse

All research arises from and authorises itself within a given culture of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Since the 1990s, many studies reporting childhood

domestic abuse have appeared in the academic literature. The majority of these have been generated through classical experimental designs and positivistic paradigms (Georgsson et al., 2011a). In contrast, very few qualitative studies are available about children's experiences of domestic abuse (Ravi & Casolaro, 2018). As such, quantitative questionnaires with predetermined questions that allow for finite responses are used to amass data (Georgsson et al., 2011a). The dependence on quantitative research designs has resulted in knowledge generation about childhood domestic abuse that is drawn from psychometric instruments. More specifically, many studies (Ehrensaft & Cohen, 2012; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; English et al., 2009; Graham-Bermann et al., 2009; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Semel, & Shapiro, 2002; Malik, 2008; Martinez-Torteya, Bogard, Von Eye & Levendosky, 2009; Ybarra, Wilkens, & Lieberman, 2007) use the psychometric test known as the Child Behaviour Checklist, or CBCL (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). The CBCL originated as a parent-report questionnaire used to rate children's various behavioural problems, such as anxiousness, depression, aggressiveness, hyperactivity and noncompliance. However, this measure was not developed to measure the impact of childhood exposure to domestic abuse (Edleson, 1999; Kimball, 2016). Other popular measures used in studies (Bogat, DoJonghe, Levendosky, Davidson, & von Eye, 2006; Graham-Bermann et al., 2009; Graham-Bermann, Howell, Lilly, & Devoe, 2011; Martinez-Torteya et al., 2009) to understand the topic of children and domestic abuse include the Becks Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer & Brown, 1996) which measures the intensity of depressive symptoms. Such instruments have been used to define problems using the binary opposition of the normal and the pathological or abnormal. Milner and O'Bryne (2009, p. 9) label this approach the "forensic gaze".

The psychometric measures used to understand children's experiences of domestic abuse reflect the dominant biomedical model. Positivistic quantitative measures are historically assigned a high degree of legitimacy in the fields of psychology and medicine, which may explain how they have come to dominate childhood studies. These two fields are also responsible for the first studies about children (Greene & Hill, 2005; Hogan, 2005). The quantitative methods and methodologies associated with these fields have traditionally been hailed as the gold standard in an era where science and scientific methods are considered authoritative (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006; Holmes, Murray, Peron, & Rail, 2006). Because

of this biomedical orientation, the common goal of collecting information about childhood domestic abuse has primarily focused on isolating and mapping the adverse effects of domestic abuse by revealing children's diversion from developmental norms. An example of how this trend of methodological fundamentalism (Denzin et al., 2006) is alive and well in the research about childhood domestic abuse is provided by Kimball (2016) who chose to exclude all qualitative research from a review of the literature about children and domestic abuse. One problem with an overreliance on positivist research orientations in this field is the resultant construction of children as passive, damaged and dangerous victims. The next section further explores how children are constructed in the bulk of the literature about childhood domestic abuse.

2.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDREN IN DOMESTIC ABUSE RESEARCH

This section builds on the finding that, when childhood domestic abuse is examined using positivistic quantitative research orientations, the chief reported outcome is negative impacts on childhood development. I argue that the dominant perspectives used to study childhood domestic abuse appear to have subverted a more in-depth philosophical questioning of the construction of children in domestic abuse research. By applying future-oriented discourses, which position children as developing rather than existing, much of the research about childhood domestic abuse reinforces the idea that children are damaged, passive and dangerous victims. As such, childhood research literature requires a critical review to examine how conceptual frameworks influence children's representation and participation (Christensen & James, 2017). In line with this thinking, it is important to situate the study of the child in this field of research to interrogate constructions of children in the domestic abuse literature.

2.2.1 The Damaged Child

A key theme in the bulk of childhood domestic abuse research is that children are adversely affected by exposure to interparental violence. Recognising how domestic abuse harms children is, without a doubt, a critical finding and an important

task for researchers and policymakers. However, problems emerge when the main goal of the research is fixed on discovering and reporting only the damage that results from abuse. By situating children as damaged victims, previous research has provided little room for other interpretations of their identity and their ability to survive and respond. To gain an understanding of how this pattern of researching children has developed, it is necessary to review the early research about childhood domestic abuse with a view to unpicking how children are constructed as damaged victims in the literature.

In 1999, Edleson argued that the development problems children experience as a result of witnessing domestic abuse was one of the most important issues for program design and policy development. Edleson (1999) was not alone in the quest to determine how exposure to domestic abuse harms children. Among all the early studies undertaken about children and domestic abuse, the most commonly reported outcome was how children's development is impaired when they witness domestic violence (Goddard & Bedi, 2010; Holden, 1998; Holden, Geffner & Jouriles, 1998; Kimball, 2016; Laing & Humphreys, 2013; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). Recent evidence suggests that this trend continues to dominate research about children and domestic abuse. For example, Överlien (2010) conducted a review of the research and found that 80 per cent of the literature about childhood domestic abuse published between 1995 and 2008 continued to focus on the negative effects domestic abuse has on children. The findings from this body of research show that exposure to domestic abuse can impede the emotional and behavioural functioning of children (Graham-Bermann & Seng, 2005; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Knapp, 1998; Wolfe, Crooks, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003). Studies also report that children who lived with domestic abuse displayed symptoms of internalising problems, such as suicidal ideation, specific fears and phobias, tics, insomnia, as well as externalising problems, such as disruptive behaviour, delinquency and violence (Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Hilberman & Munson, 1977; Levine, 1975). The consensus in the literature suggests that domestic abuse is one of the most toxic things children can experience (Groves, 2001; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

Research showing that domestic abuse is damaging to children gave rise to a quest to make sense of how exposure to domestic abuse produces adverse outcomes for children (Hughes & Luke, 1998). Trauma theory is an often-used perspective applied to the study of childhood domestic abuse to make sense of how such

experiences affect the development of children. By drawing on evidence from the field of neurobiology, trauma theory explains that exposure to threat during childhood can damage the developing brain (Gilfus, 1999). Alterations in brain structure provide tangible evidence explaining why children who have lived with domestic abuse experience, for example, difficulties with concentration, mastering emotions, memory, comprehending consequences, or gauging appropriate responses to stimuli (Tsavoussis, Stanislaw, Stoicea, & Papadimos, 2014). Studies highlighting the impact of domestic abuse on children and that seek to understand how to address the resulting harm are essential areas of research (Etherington & Baker, 2016; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). However, by linking brain trauma as injury with childhood experiences of domestic abuse, trauma theory has inadvertently continued to position children as damaged victims.

Some trauma theorists unapologetically position children as damaged as a result of their experiences. For example, trauma theorists Bloom and Farragher (2013) assert that questions such as "what is wrong with you" or "what happened to you" lie at the heart of trauma theory investigations. Other researchers, operating from a more strengths-orientated perspective (Saleebey, 1996), focusing on the capacities and potential of people, argue that such questions draw out stories of damage and locate children within a victim framework that views them primarily as injured parties rather than as active social agents (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hogan, 2005). The extent to which children are situated within an injury model becomes clear when trauma theorists, such as Bloom and Farragher (2013, p. 5), suggest that:

> trauma theory presupposes [that] a cause for one's difficulties is not an individual character flaw, a moral weakness, or innate malevolence, but a result of injury. This is especially important if those injuries have occurred in childhood because normal development of body, brain, and mind is likely to be derailed.

From this perspective, the 'normal' development of children is shunted off-track as a result of injuries related to trauma exposure.

One problem with this injury-focused approach is the implication that children who are exposed to adversity such as childhood domestic abuse will sustain permanent damage. Such assumptions are often documented in the professional literature. For example, Teicher (2002, p. 75), in an article entitled 'Scars that won't heal', writes that trauma can "permanently wire a child's brain to cope with a malevolent world" and

that "once these key brain alterations occur, there may be no going back". The framing of children as irrevocably damaged has resulted in an unprecedented and overwhelming focus on the psychopathological and negative psychosocial impacts affecting children who live with domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2016). Inherent in such approaches is the individualised focus on the child as an injured person at risk of deviating from the 'normal' and healthy trajectory to adulthood as a result of their experiences. A fundamental problem with this widespread assumption is that not all children are traumatised as a result of living with domestic abuse.

A range of studies, (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003; Hughes & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Martinez-Torteya et al., 2009; Levendosky et al., 2013) report that many children emerge from experiences of adversity without injury. These findings cast doubt on the usefulness of trauma theory as a dominant framework to fully understand childhood domestic abuse. For example, Garbarino et al. (1992) estimate that up to 80 per cent of children exposed to extreme stressors do not sustain developmental damage. The figures from studies specific to the impact of childhood domestic abuse are less optimistic, yet are still persuasive. Two meta-analyses (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003) have shown that nearly 40 per cent of children who experience domestic abuse present with outcomes that are like or better than those for children without these experiences. Studies have also indicated that 54 to 65 per cent of children emerge from experiences of childhood domestic abuse unscathed (Hughes & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Martinez-Torteya et al., 2009; Levendosky et al., 2013), or with enhanced coping skills and developed strategies for survival during adulthood (Humphreys, 2001; Daniel & Wassell, 2002). Despite these results, the current evidence base tends to focus only on children's experiences of trauma or adversity, which is not only prescriptive of experiences of childhood domestic abuse but also suggests the current knowledge base does not accurately reflect the experiences of children who are not 'traumatised' by domestic abuse.

Despite growing evidence that many children survive domestic abuse without adverse effects, very little research acknowledges childhood domestic abuse survivors' agency and resilience (Överlien & Hydén, 2009; Anderson, 2010; Överlien, 2010; Hague et al., 2012; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015). A recent review of the qualitative research investigating children's experience of domestic abuse found that only two of

the 40 studies reviewed explicitly described children's active participation (Noble-Carr et al., 2017). Instead, an ongoing focus on what is wrong with, or what has happened 'to' children (Bloom & Farragher, 2013) sustains constructions of children as damaged victims acted upon by trauma rather than subjects in their own lives. Underpinning and reinforcing approaches that position children who experience adversity as damaged victims is a specific understanding of children as either passive recipients of trauma or victims of parental practices (Katz, 2013). The latter assumption is prominent in the childhood domestic abuse evidence base, which constructs children through a lens of passivity.

2.2.2 The Passive Child

The study of children and childhood is a relatively new field of research in which many studies uncritically operationalise the notion of the child as passive through the use of a developmental discourse (Corsaro, 2018; James & Prout, 2015). Underpinning this discourse is the idea that before children are recognised as valid beings, they must first undergo a process of socialisation. This section argues that this dominant view of children as 'not there yet' has resulted in an overabundance of research that fails to notice and value children's immediate, direct and active experiences.

The developmental approach, originating from the field of psychology, is centred on the idea of natural growth (James & Prout, 2015). The features of a developmental model include the assignment of rationality as a universal mark of adulthood, with children positioned as apprenticed to achieving this goal (James & Prout, 2015). Constructing children as existing somewhere on a pathway to adulthood reflects an approach in which children are understood as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings' (Corsaro, 2018; Norozi & Moen, 2016; Qvortrup, 2009; Woodhead, 2013). The distinction between children as 'becomings' and adults as 'beings' sets up an otherness between children and adults as "two different instances of the same species" (James & Prout, 2015, p. 40). Thus, the child is viewed as different from or less than, and the process of socialisation is understood as a way of bridging the gap that exists between child and adult (Corsaro, 2018; James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 2009). James and Prout (2015, p. 41) suggest that socialisation is "the process which magically transforms the one into the other, the key which turns the asocial child into a social adult".

Underpinning the concept of socialisation is the idea that children are 'taken over' by society and trained by adults to become competent and contributing adult members of society (Corsaro, 2018). As such, society appropriates the child through a unilateral adult-to-child process of transmission (Katz, 2013, 2014). This model of transmission is based on an understanding of interactions where influence is perceived to flow in one direction only – from adult to child (De Mol, Lemmens, Verhofstadt, & Kuczynski, 2013; Katz, 2013; Kuczynski, 2003). Corsaro (2018) refers to such perspectives as deterministic models of socialisation because the child, as a passive and docile object, is imprinted upon by adults through the experience. This adult-centric view fails to capture the complexities of bidirectional processes of interaction (De Mol et al., 2013) and positions children as without agency and mostly ineffective in influencing events or relationships (Humphreys et al., 2008).

The application of deterministic models of socialisation means that "the child is portrayed, like the laboratory rat, as being at the mercy of external stimuli: passive and conforming", instead of being recognised as an active social agent (James & Prout, 2015, p. 41). A consequence of this mindset is that children's life experiences, which include their actions, responses and resistances, become minimised or ignored, while their future endeavours take precedence (Corsaro, 2018; James & Prout, 2015). Leading sociologist Kingsley Davis (1994, p. 217, as cited in Qvortrup, 2009) summarises this foundational assumption in the following statement:

> An individual's most important functions for society are performed when he is fully adult, not when he is immature. Hence society's treatment of the child is chiefly preparatory and the evaluation of him mainly anticipatory (like a savings account). Any doctrine which views the child's needs as paramount and those of organised society as secondary is a sociological anomaly.

Here Davis minimises the value of children as beings and places currency in what they may become. Situating child studies in anticipatory socialisation frameworks gives rise to future-oriented approaches that position children as little more than "passive representatives of the future generation" (James & Prout, 2015, p. 41).

Future-orientated frameworks have emerged as an influential and useful theoretical perspective for bringing attention to the risks to children as a result of their exposure to domestic abuse. Such anticipatory orientations not only dominate how the period of childhood is understood (Qvortrup, 2009) but also heavily influence scientific discourse and common parlance in child studies. However, whenever

specific theoretical orientations begin to dominate a field, the body of knowledge becomes at risk of being uncritical of the implicit viewpoints and thus requires careful deconstruction and analysis.

Childhood study theorists argue that the tendency for research with children to be viewed through a future-oriented lens has its roots in functionalist accounts of society (Corsaro, 2018; James & Prout, 2015). The functionalist perspective is based mainly on the works of Talcott Parsons and posits that society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. When applied to anticipatory approaches in the study of children, the functionalist perspective privileges the process of child socialisation as an indicator of how children will integrate into society successfully for the good of that society (Corsaro, 2018).

Links to functionalism are detectable in the early research about childhood domestic abuse through the shared conceptualisation of the child as an incomplete and passive object for which adulthood would signal the end point of dependency and formation. For instance, Cicchetti and Lynch (1995) focus on how such impediments to development detract from individuals' chances of achieving successful adaptation to society and evolving competence 'when they grow up'. Orlofsky (1981) examines how childhood domestic abuse impacts children's social expectations of appropriate family roles both in the present and "in their projects of the future" through the expectations of their roles as mothers and fathers. Cummings (1998, p. 68) highlights the importance of "sleeper effects", which are developmental problems that emerge in "later life". Flood and Fegus (2008) also reflect an anticipatory approach in the title of their work, 'An assault on our future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships'. These examples highlight how the study of children and domestic abuse has developed as forward-looking to ensure that children were meeting the necessary requisites to ensure the smooth functioning of adult society (Corsaro, 2018).

The anticipatory approach to the study of children invited a new series of concerns related to the risks associated with the failure of adequately socialising children (James & Prout, 2015). This fear is captured in an article about the impacts of child abuse by Teicher (2002, p.75) in the statement "society reaps what it sows in the way it nurtures its children". This quotation highlights an underpinning concern in the literature that children, who are left untrained or trained poorly, are at risk of becoming

a threat to the good of society (Corsaro, 2018). The development of such ideas reinforces the construction of children who experience ruptures in socialisation pathways, such as those who live with domestic abuse, as a danger to the harmonious functioning of society (Prout & James, 2015). In the next section, I extend this argument by exploring how, in addition to constructing children as damaged and passive victims, the literature also positions children as a possible threat to the future.

2.2.3 The Dangerous Child

There is a body of evidence within childhood domestic abuse research that reports that exposure to abusive behaviours modelled by parents socialises children into maladaptive ways of interacting in later adult intimate relationships (Laing, 2000; Franklin & Kercher, 2012). For example, Ehrensaft et al. (2009, p. 741, as cited in Callaghan & Alexander, 2015) report children who live with domestic abuse as being:

> more likely to gravitate to an aggressive, deviant peer group. As adolescents and emerging adults, they select their romantic partners from these groups of peers who are deficient in terms of interpersonal skills […] and experience conflictual romantic relationships […] Maltreatment may therefore be one pathway to involvement in conflictual, abusive romantic relationships.

In this quote, Ehrensaft et al. (2009) are discussing how children who experience domestic abuse are likely to reproduce similar behaviours in their own adult relationships. Childhood domestic abuse studies which conclude that "violence breeds violence" (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015) tend to draw upon intergenerational violence theory (Överlien, 2010; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015), which is rooted in Bandura's (1977) social learning perspective.

In line with intergenerational violence theory, some studies report that children who have lived with domestic abuse are more likely to experience intimate partner violence perpetrated against them in their adulthoods (Maker et al., 1998) or to perpetrate abusive behaviours themselves as adults (Herrenkohl et al., 1983). One study suggests that boys who see their father use violent behaviour had a 1000 per cent greater chance of engaging in violent relationships than boys who had not had such experiences (Straus, Gelles et al., 1980). Such alarming statements may explain why many mothers and children, who grow up in or parent from within domestically

abusive families, often identify a fear of reproducing domestic abuse (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002).

The prevalence of the intergenerational discourse of domestic abuse has had a profound impact on how people understand children who live with domestic abuse. For example, Callaghan and Alexander (2015) found that the intergenerational transmission of violence theory heavily influences many human service practitioners in their work with survivors of domestic abuse. Similar attitudes are identifiable in the general population. For instance, community attitude surveys reveal that the idea that growing up in a violent home is a precursor to intimate partner violence is a prominent belief among the general population (Lane & Knowles, 2000). Despite the popularity of the intergenerational cycle of violence theory, there is ambiguity within the evidence base to support claims that future violence in intimate partner relationships is an outcome of childhood domestic abuse.

Several studies investigating the intergenerational transmission of violence theory have produced contradictory evidence. For example, a meta-analysis by Stith et al. (2000) of 160 studies found only a weak to moderate correlation between experiences of childhood domestic abuse and adult intimate partner violence. However, Franklin and Kercher (2012) found *no* significant correlation between witnessing inter-parental violence in childhood and physical abuse perpetration or victimisation as an adult. Moreover, other research has claimed that most victims and aggressors of domestic abuse come from non-violent childhoods (Humphreys & Mullender, 2000). These mixed results suggest there is "no evidence that resolutely proves a causal relationship between direct or indirect child abuse and becoming an abuser or victim in adulthood" (Humphreys et al., 2008, np). Instead, researchers have stressed that domestic abuse, rather than a learnt behaviour passed down through generations, is driven by structural inequalities and gendered power imbalances that reinforce harmful stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Fulu et al., 2013). As such, any links drawn between childhood experiences of domestic abuse and the perpetration of intimate partner violence in adulthood must be understood within a historical and societal context, rather than simply as the transference of behaviours from parents to children established in individual families (Fulu et al., 2013).

So far in this chapter, I have provided an outline of some of the dominant approaches that have influenced the foundational research about children, childhood

and children's experiences of domestic abuse. I have argued that these early approaches predominantly depict children as damaged, passive and dangerous victims. The next section introduces studies that draw on interpretive theory to position children as social actors who are engaged when living in domestically abusive families.

2.3   CHILDREN AS ACTIVE SOCIAL AGENTS IN AN EVERYDAY CONTEXT OF ABUSE

By the end of the 1900s, sociological theories of childhood began to break free from individualistic doctrines that consider children to be the products of adult socialisation. Interpretive theories of childhood emerged and sought to capture the innovative and creative ways in which children engage in families, peer groups and society as a whole (Corsaro, 2018; Greene & Hill, 2005). A central component of an interpretive approach to the study of childhood is an appreciation of how children negotiate, share and contribute to the creation of culture, with adults and peers alike (Corsaro, 2018; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). As such, an interpretive approach enables the viewing of children as interactional beings who are engaged in an ongoing context (Graham, 2011; Corsaro, 2018). In other words, children are not constructed as passive and 'developing beings', but are instead understood as active social agents who are engaged in cultures and relationships. Two new ideas arise from the application of interpretivist research in this area, the first being that children are active social actors and that these actions are embedded in an ongoing and complex web of social structures.

One branch of this body of work is known as the new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997; James & Prout, 2015). The new sociology of childhood is an approach that understands the concept of childhood as socially constructed; as something that exists quite separate from biological immaturity; and as something that cannot be divorced from social structures such as class, gender or ethnicity (James & Prout, 2015). From this perspective, children are active agents who are engaged socially and culturally in the societies in which they reside and, as such, are worthy of study in their own right (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, 2017; Christensen & Prout, 2005; De Graeve, 2015; James & Prout, 2015; Prout & James, 1997). As a consequence, there is a rapidly growing body of evidence in which children are

encouraged to self-report their experiences of childhood domestic abuse (Buckley, Holt, & Whelan, 2007; Eriksson & Näsman, 2012; Goddard & Mudaly, 2004; Katz, 2013, 2014, 2016a; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002; Överlien, 2012; Överlien, 2012b; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

In addition to prioritising the inclusion of children's own voices in the literature, proponents of the sociology of childhood adopted vastly different research questions from those used in earlier studies that focused on the effects of abuse. Wade (1997), an early critic of childhood domestic abuse research, was one of the first to suggest that, rather than continuing to determine 'what happened to children', researchers should instead ask children directly about their experiences of living with violence. The emergence of research informed by the new sociology of childhood naturally facilitated this line of questioning and thus offered the field more nuanced ways to recognise how children experience living in domestically abusive homes. Consequently, research has started to emerge suggesting that children experience domestic abuse as a complex and ongoing context (Callaghan, Alexander, & Fellin, 2016; Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2016a, 2016b).

When children are directly consulted about their experiences of domestic abuse, findings show that they identify non-physical abuse and living with fear and uncertainty as central components of their lived experiences. For example, Epstein and Keep (1995) analysed calls to an English youth helpline and found that, rather than speaking about physical incidents of abuse, children opted to discuss the confusion and anxiousness of living day-to-day with domestic abuse. Australian researchers Bagshaw et al. (2000) reached similar findings when they conducted focus groups with people about different forms of family violence. In their study, non-physical tactics of abuse featured heavily, and the young people who participated suggested that it was impossible to experience physical violence in isolation from non-physical abuses. Correspondingly, Swanston et al. (2014) interviewed children and their mothers about experiences of domestic abuse and found that children often discussed the pervasive sense of threat and fear they felt, even outside the occurrence of incidents of violence. Although small in number, these studies suggest the important insights that are gained when young people are consulted directly about their experiences. These findings highlight a need for a more in-depth examination of how survivors of childhood

domestic abuse conceptualise their holistic experiences of living in domestically abusive homes.

Insights into children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse outside the occurrence of physical or verbal abuse are unusual in this field. Children's stories of domestic abuse that occur between incidents of physical abuse have often failed to attract the attention of researchers (AIHW, 2019). Instead, the majority of studies focus on children's experiences of witnessing the perpetration of physical abuse by parental figures (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015; Graham-Bermann, 1998; Katz, 2016a, 2016b; Noble-Carr et al., 2017; Stark, 2017). The tendency to privilege occurrences of physical violence in the study of childhood domestic abuse is reflected in the terms used to describe children's' experiences. Terms such as 'domestic/intimate partner violence', 'violence', and 'incident' or 'episode' saturate the literature (Buckley et al., 2007; DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011; Holden, 2003; Katz, 2014, 2016; Stanley, 2011). Researchers who work in the field of domestic abuse (Stark, 2007, 2017; Katz, 2016a) call the approach focusing on incidents of violence and the injuries that result the 'physical incident model'.

2.3.1 Restrictions of the Physical Incident Model

Despite the new insights provided by interpretive approaches within the field of childhood domestic abuse, much of the research about children's experience of domestic abuse remains limited to the physical incident model (Katz, 2016a; Stark, 2017; Callaghan et al., 2015, Jouriles & McDonald, 2015; Naughton et al., 2019). Haselschwerdt et al. (2019) suggests that, despite the growing body of literature, little is known about how children experience domestic abuse beyond acts of physical violence. Examples of this limitation are evident in studies such as the one by DeBoard-Lucas and Grych (2011), who challenge the notion of children as passive recipients of domestic abuse, yet limit their study to children's reactions to "incidents" of "physical violence" and analyse children's descriptions of "a fight that they had witnessed". Similarly, Överlien and Hydén (2009, p. 479), adopt a strong focus on children as active social agents in their study, but also confine their investigation to children's actions "during a domestic violence episode", and structure their research questions in terms of "what do children do during and after the violent act? What are their actions during the act, and how do they imagine they will act in the future when/if

a violent episode occurs?" (Överlien & Hydén, 2009, p.481). Research designs centred on physical abuse limit the scope of children's responses to accounts of assault rather than inviting them to describe their experiences of domestic abuse as they understand and survive it. As a consequence, a gap is created in the literature in which the daily experience of children living with the oppression of domestic abuse remains outside the discussion and is therefore rendered invisible (Bagshaw et al., 2000, Noble-Carr et al., 2017).

Despite the dominance of the physical incident model in childhood domestic abuse research, evidence suggests that children still try to convey their broader everyday experiences of living with domestic abuse. A striking example occurred in Överlien and Hydén's (2009) study, where the researchers invited a young child to describe "a typical violent episode". Rather than describing an episode of violence, as directed by the researchers, Dina told a story about how her experiences of domestic abuse are broader than occasions of violence. Överlien and Hydén (2009, p. 485) recognised Dina's broader experience of domestic abuse:

> Here Dina describes an episode of violence against her mother, from a small child's perspective. She doesn't describe the actual physical violence against the mother, but instead, her actions, feelings and the extreme fear that keeps her from going to the bathroom.

In this passage, Överlien and Hydén (2009) capture the elusive difference between a child's direct experience of ongoing and pervasive domestic abuse and a child's experience of witnessing an incident of physical violence against a parent. Rather than describing an episode of violence against her mother, as Överlien and Hydén (2009) suggest Dina does, Dina has instead described her own everyday experience of domestic abuse as a victim in her own right.

These findings bring into question whether or not the information determined by research to date, that is restricted to the physical incident model, is reflective of children's ideas of what the most important aspects of living with domestic abuse are (Noble-Carr et al., 2017). Jouriles and McDonald (2015) argue that the context in which domestic abuse occurs is vital for determining the impact of the experience. Indeed, even the limited amount of research that consults children directly shows that, in addition to identifying a broader range of experiences of abuse, children also identify their contextual experiences, and often these accounts detail experiences of

non-physical forms of abuse that are assessed by young people as being more impactful than occasions of physical violence (Bagshaw et al., 2000). For example, Callaghan et al. (2015, p. 11) found that children identify the "inescapable nature of internalised psychological abuse and control" as a central experience of childhood domestic abuse. Naughton et al. (2017; 2019) tested these qualitative findings by comparing the effect of psychological wellbeing from exposure to psychological abuse (behaviour that is intimidating, isolating, manipulating, or controlling) with exposure to physical abuse (hitting, punching, kicking, and use of a weapon). The results indicated that psychological abuse is related to reduced psychological wellbeing, while no significant effect was identified from exposure to physical abuse. These results suggest that, if asked, children may identify aspects of domestic abuse that include non-physical abuse as more relevant to their experiences of domestic abuse. If, as researchers, we consistently focus on aspects of childhood domestic abuse that may not be the most salient experiences that children themselves would identify, the question arises, how useful is such research to the needs of children?

Similar limitations can also be identified in early studies on women's experiences of domestic abuse. These studies about women's experiences of intimate partner violence centred on occasions or discrete incidents or episodes of physical abuse (Stark, 2007, 2009a). The injuries sustained by women were assessment markers used to determine the severity of their experiences of abuse (Stark, 2007). However, the physical incident model was abandoned after claims by women that physical abuse was often not the worst part of living with domestic abuse, and that episodes of physical violence were more often "punctuations" in long histories of abuse that included a range of other tactics (Stark, 2017). Researchers of adult intimate partner violence developed an awareness of a gap between the dominant physical incident model used by researchers to understand domestic abuse and the often 'non-physical' abuses that informed strategies used by men to oppress women (Stark, 2009). Recognition of similar gaps has emerged in the study of children and domestic abuse (Stark, 2017), suggesting that a broader understanding than that offered by the physical incident model is also required to comprehensively understand children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse (Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2016; Kimball, 2016; McLeod, 2018).

The use of the full definition of domestic abuse, as generally applied to studies of adult intimate partner violence, may create the possibility of gaining greater insight into children's everyday experiences (Kimball, 2016). In a recent review of the literature about childhood domestic abuse, Kimball (2016, p. 631) concludes that:

> Generally, the definition of domestic violence includes a pattern of abusive behaviors to maintain power and control over an intimate partner, which implies a recurrent way of behaving. Yet research tends to focus on a specific event of violence – mostly physical abuse – as demonstrated by the data collection methods (i.e., measures and population). While there may be arguments about whether to broaden the definition of children's exposure to be more inclusive of domestic violence that includes sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse because of the unintended consequences and implications of a broader definition, a comprehensive approach provides an opportunity to capture the full effects of children's exposure.

Kimball (2016) goes on to suggest that incorporating such an approach may be useful for capturing the nuanced experiences of childhood domestic abuse that are currently absent from much of the literature. Indeed, lessons learnt from similar omissions in research with adults' experiences of intimate partner violence corroborate this recommendation.

Despite doubts surrounding the use of the physical incident model, studies continue to limit experiences of childhood domestic abuse to a narrow physical definition of what constitutes domestic abuse (Haselschwerdt, 2019; Naughton et al., 2019). Very few studies to date have sought to understand children's experiences of coercive control (Callaghan et al., 2015; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019; Katz, 2016a) and how it might affect them (Jouriles & McDonald, 2015). Despite this gap, there are some studies that have cast the definitional net wider to include the full range of behaviours within domestic abuse. In the next section, I examine the benefits of these new and emerging approaches.

2.3.2 Childhood Domestic Abuse in a Model of Coercive Control

For decades, feminist scholars have maintained that domestic abuse is an act of power and control used to reinforce male dominance (Dobash et al., 1992; Almeida & Durkin, 1999; Stark, 2007, 2009, 2012; Pitman, 2010; Laing & Humphreys, 2013). This position suggests that perpetrators use physical violence or the threat of violence to establish and maintain a pattern of power and control which is then used to entrap

those they abuse (Stark, 2007, 2009). Feminist literature frames ongoing entrapment as an outcome of the operation of coercive control, which includes acts of violence, intimidation, isolation and control (Stark, 2007, 2009).

Viewing domestic abuse through a model of coercive control reveals physical violence as a component of a more extensive suite of tactics of abuse used by perpetrators to maintain power and control. Although often considered to be the hallmark of domestic abuse, actual physical violence is more often infrequent or even non-existent in domestically abusive relationships (Callaghan et al., 2015; McLeod, 2018; Smith, 2018; Stark, 2007). Stark (2012b) suggests that even when physical violence is a part of the pattern of behaviour aimed at enforcing control and compliance, low-level violence and its cumulative effects are more representative of abuse. Perpetrators use tactics of coercive control to evoke dependency in those they abuse by isolating them from support and resources and depriving them of the means for self-determination (Stark, 2007). Columnist and domestic abuse survivor Lauren Laverne (2014, np) provides the following description of her experience of coercive control in an article that appeared in *The Guardian*:

> What I remember most is that it's like being put in a box. How you end up there is the biggest trick – I never managed to work that one out. Maybe you think it's a treasure box at first: you're in there because you're special. Soon the box starts to shrink. Every time you touch the edges, there is an argument. So you try to make yourself fit. You curl up, become smaller, quieter, remove the excessive, offensive part of your personality. You eliminate people and interests, change your behavior. But still, the box gets smaller. You think it's your fault. You don't realize that the box is shrinking, or who is making it smaller. You don't yet understand that you will never, ever be tiny enough to fit.

Laverne's description captures the essence of how control shapes and constrains the actions of adults caught in its web. It highlights the argument by Stark (2009a) that coercive control is a 'liberty crime' that harms the freedom and human rights of women and children.

When consulted directly, children also show that they are aware of the operations of coercive control, as well as other types of non-physical abuse (Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2016; McLeod, 2018). Evidencing this, Callaghan et al. (2015) interviewed 20 children in the United Kingdom, aged 8 to 18, about how they coped with and managed their experiences of domestic abuse, including coercive control.

The children interviewed discussed experiencing coercive control as an everyday constraining force. Constraints extended to their use of space in the home, their self-expression, and their development of relationships within their families and the broader social sphere. A similar research approach is undertaken by Katz (2016), who conducted 30 semi-structured interviews (15 with mothers and 15 with children) that sought to explore how children support mothers who are experiencing domestic abuse. The studies conducted by Katz (2016) and Callaghan et al. (2015) show that domestic abuse is not something that enters and exits children's lives at different points in time. Instead, it is more compatible with the model of domestic abuse that Stark (2007) applies to adult women's experiences. More recently, Morris (2009) has suggested a model that incorporates an understanding of domestic abuse as a gendered process of enacting power and control that affects the daily lives of all family members, including children.

Morris (2009) proposes conceptualising domestic abuse as an abusive household gender regime. From this perspective, domestic abuse is an omnipresent, embodied and internalised experience that is "interwoven through time and intimate space into the daily lives of children" (Morris, 2009, p. 417). Morris proposes that domestic abuse is experienced within a system of ongoing control that constrains and suppresses the liberty of children who survive in such regimes of power.

The small body of qualitative literature that examines children's experiences of domestic abuse as contextually embedded in the dynamics of coercion and control (Callaghan et al., 2015; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019; Katz, 2016; Morris, 2009) has also highlighted previously unrecognised responses by children as forms of resistance. When study designs are created that identify children's broader experiences of domestic abuse that is inclusive of coercive control, space is created in which responses to these previously unnoticed forms of abuse can also be recognised. For instance, Katz (2015) found evidence of children actively engaging in behaviours aimed at helping mothers survive to live with violent partners. Katz (2013, 2014) reports that children used a range of gentle strategies to support their mothers. This research suggests that children make informed decisions about how to respond to domestic abuse by incorporating assessments of the ever-changing and precarious environmental contexts in which they live. Similar results are reported by Callaghan

et al. (2015), who found that children intentionally managed what they did and said daily to minimise any escalations of abuse. They state that children:

> learned to manage what they said and what they did, as a way of preventing themselves from being too visible, too loud, and too noticeable to the abuser, as a way of not drawing attention to themselves.

The pioneering research conducted by Callaghan et al. (2015) and Katz (2016) are exceptions to the bulk of literature about childhood domestic abuse and show that not only are children aware of tactics of coercive control, but they actively respond to these types of abuse in subtle ways throughout their everyday lives. However, aside from these studies, there is very little research that explores children's experiences of coercive control in a sustained manner (Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2016; Smith, 2018). The lack of attention to these experiences of childhood domestic abuse is concerning given that emotionally abusive and controlling behaviours are the most significant predictors of intimate partner homicide (Stark, 2007).

The lack of research about children's experiences of coercive control is just one example of how the diversity of children's experiences of domestic abuse is washed from the professional literature when survivors of childhood domestic abuse are not given the opportunity to inform the research agenda. As such, the impact of non-physical abuse such as coercive control, and the strategies that children use to respond, cope or resist these tactics of control, remain largely unexplored. Thus, the research about childhood domestic abuse has produced a specific narrative that works to homogenise children's experiences. However, children's experiences of domestic abuse are diverse. In the next section, I critically assess the literature to determine other stories and experiences of children excluded from the literature and how the nuances within stories are diluted.

2.4 NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR THE STUDY OF CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE

The previous sections advance the argument to incorporate more stories of diversity and difference to the study of childhood domestic abuse (Etherington & Baker, 2016; Hague et al., 2012; Mullender et al., 2002). In this next section, I use a feminist intersectional approach to build on these ideas and suggest that the act of

homogenisation of children into the single category of 'the child' further distorts how the lived experience of childhood domestic abuse is understood.

2.4.1 A Feminist Intersectional Approach

Intersectionality refers to how aspects of social identity (such as gender, race/ethnicity, age) intersect and interact with systems of oppression (such as sexism, racism and adultism) (Etherington & Baker, 2016). The incorporation of a feminist intersectional approach into the study of childhood domestic abuse can shed light on how social locations intersect with systems of oppression to influence children's experiences of domestic abuse (Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016). Inequalities are never the result of single factors, but are instead outcomes of intersections of social location, power relations and experience (Bograd, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; Etherington & Baker, 2016; Hankivsky, 2014; Sokoloff, 2008). As such, experiences of childhood domestic abuse are likely to be influenced by a variety of factors that include, but are not limited to, gender, cultural and class background, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, health, ability, sexuality, family, and community support (Etherington & Baker, 2016; Hague et al., 2012; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). A core strength of a feminist intersectional approach is that, by recognising multiple identities, inroads are made into how individuals simultaneously experience privilege and oppression (Hankivsky, 2014).

Successful use of a feminist intersectional research approach with childhood studies from other disciplines strengthens the argument for the application of an intersectional approach to childhood domestic abuse. For example, research from the field of criminology has found that intersectionality of gender and race best explains young adult offending (Bell, 2013) and delinquency (Lahlah et al., 2013). A feminist intersectional approach has also been employed by Morris (2007) to study how race and class shape the perception of femininity for Black girls in educational settings. Similarly, Amoah (2007) uses intersectionality to show how the interaction of other identities, such as race, religion, culture, context, class and position status with the family unit, further marginalise female children. What these studies have in common is that they all provide an understanding of the diversity of the lived experiences of those studied. In doing so, they show that there are many different childhoods and

highlight how 'childhood' is not a universal and homogenous experience (Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017).

Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017) suggest that childhood studies can take advantage of intersectionality by using a two-pronged approach. The first prong focuses on children's lived experiences in a way that recognises age, reinserts race, and focuses on power. The second component of the approach recognises children as competent and knowing agents. Etherington and Baker (2016) suggest that children are uniquely situated in systems of power as a result of their categorisation as different from adults because of their age. However, many scholars working with the intersections of multiple lines of difference have turned a blind eye to the dynamics of age (Thorne, 2004). Age, alongside other categories of identity, is recognised as an axis of difference that influences a person's ability to exercise agency (De Graeve, 2015). Thus, children's age is an axis of difference that intersects with other categories to shape lives differently from adults (De Graeve, 2015; Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017). As Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017, p. 11) state:

> If the starting point of understanding childhood is not necessarily a homogenous and universaling notion of 'age' but, rather, 'difference', as structured by the particular dynamics of race, class, gender, geography and other categories of difference, this creates a powerful link between intersectionality and childhood studies that does not de-prioritise race but puts age in the context of race and other axis of difference.

As established earlier in this chapter, the social construction of age in Western societies facilitates the stereotypical view of children as 'less than' their adult counterparts. Hopkins and Pain (2007, p. 288) suggest these types of "sweeping generalisations" affixed to age conceal the social, cultural, gendered and economic diversity of people, whether they be young or old. Within this system of power, children experience prejudice based on the belief that adults possess the power to make decisions for them and control them (Young-Bruehl, 2012). This operation of power, commonly referred to as 'adultism', is not considered in the current literature about childhood domestic abuse. If adultism is an important system of oppression for children, intersectionality can be used to reveal its significance, along with other multi-dimensional aspects of lives, and how people interpret and navigate these day-to-day experiences of power and privilege (Hankivsky, 2014; Hunting, 2014; McCall, 2005).

Despite the success of applying intersectional approaches to the study of adult intimate partner violence (Bograd, 1999; Etherington & Baker, 2016), the study of childhood domestic abuse has not benefited from similar theoretical applications (Etherington & Baker, 2016). For example, Cramer and Plummer (2009) used an intersectional approach to examine help-seeking and help-receiving by abused people of colour with disabilities. The findings from their research show how intersections of race, gender, accent, immigration status, disability, and socioeconomic status influence help-seeking actions, as well as responses from the criminal justice system and human services sector. Sokoloff (2008) also used an intersectional approach to study the experience of women living in immigrant communities who experience domestic abuse. Highlighting the diversity of the women in her study, Sokoloff (2008 p. 251) concluded that there is no "generic battered immigrant woman", and points to the macro and micro forces that affect immigrant women's experiences of domestic abuse.

This current doctoral study departs from the status quo of reinforcing existing models of trauma and psychopathological factors. Instead, it recognises the value of using intersectional approaches to generate new complex and diverse understandings of childhood domestic abuse. However, to further address issues that homogenise children's experience of childhood domestic abuse, it is also critical to consider the ethical challenges that enable and constrict some children who live with domestic abuse from contributing to research. These restrictions limit what is known about the lived experience of childhood domestic abuse by filtering out unique and diverse experiences (Cater & Överlien, 2014; Morris, Hegarty, & Humphreys, 2012; Mudaly & Goddard, 2009). The next section explores how retrospective studies with adults can enhance the current knowledge base about the lived experience of childhood domestic abuse provided by studies in which children are directly consulted.

2.4.2 Including Diverse Stories of Childhood Domestic Abuse

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013) indicates a pivotal shift in the societal rights of children to participate in research that directly affects them (Mayall, 2000; Morris et al., 2012). However, despite some significant societal shifts in the rights of children to participate in research, many accounts of childhood

domestic abuse are still excluded from the current literature for valid and ethical reasons.

The participation of children in research is subject to a range of conditions (Christensen & James, 2017), especially when the topic is determined to be sensitive (Hydén, 2008). As a consequence, many children who experience domestic abuse are excluded from participating in research because to invite them to do so would be unethical. For example, some key studies (see Mullender et al., 2002; Eriksson & Näsman, 2008; Swanston et al., 2014; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015) have restricted recruitment eligibility to children who are no longer living with or at further risk from perpetrators. Other studies (see Mullender et al., 2002; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015) have limited participation in their research to children from institutional settings as a way of ensuring that children have had, and will continue to have, access to professional support before and after discussing their experiences of abuse in a research context. Such recruitment strategies are in place to respond to the possibility of re-traumatisation of children through recounting their experiences of abuse. Another recruitment strategy to ensure that children are supported is to secure parental consent from non-offending parents before children are given the option of assenting to participation (Callaghan et al., 2016; Cater & Överlien, 2014; Morris et al., 2012; Morrow, 2009; Peled, 2001). Each of these protective layers present as a double-edged sword, providing on one hand protection from harm, while on the other excluding many children with unique stories from participating in research (Campbell, 2008; Coyne, 2010; Moore, Saunders, & McArthur, 2011).

While it is critical that researchers continue to directly consult with children and young people about their experiences of domestic abuse, it is clear that ethical barriers exist that limit the inclusion of stories to expand the current knowledge base. Excluding diverse stories of childhood domestic abuse may skew how children's experiences are portrayed in the professional literature. For example, limiting participation in research to children who no longer live with perpetrators means that stories of children whose parents never separate are not included in the literature. These children's experiences may be markedly different from children whose parents do separate. Furthermore, restricting participation to children who access support results in the exclusion of children with very different experiences from those who are able to access assistance (Cater & Överlien, 2014; Swanston et al., 2014). For example,

Swanston et al. (2014) claim that children who access services or shelters are more likely to have experienced severe physical violence and poverty. Additionally, children who access clinical services are more likely to be experiencing difficulties (Cater & Överlien, 2014), just as children who do not experience adverse effects as a result of living with domestic abuse are unlikely to be referred to clinical services. Consequently, children who show evidence of strong coping abilities may be excluded from the literature as a result of such sampling techniques (Cater & Överlien, 2014).

The restriction of children from participating in research due to parental gatekeeping also poses a risk to the inclusion of diverse stories. The motivation behind a parent's decision to restrict a child's participation is an important consideration. Mullender et al. (2002, p. 27) found that "mothers were far more often an obstacle to research access than children themselves". McGee (2000) revealed that some mothers prevented their children from participating in research due to fears that their children may say things that would result in statutory authorities becoming involved. The absence of diverse stories in the literature limits the body of knowledge about childhood domestic abuse, and reduces the possibility of developing effective interventions for children.

Given the ethical barrier that researchers face when involving children in sensitive research topics, O'Brien et al. (2013) suggest that using recounted memories of adult survivors may provide access to broader experiences of childhood domestic abuse. Retrospective study designs with adult survivors allow a pathway to a new and in-depth understanding of stories of childhood domestic abuse that have been "cloaked in silence" (O'Brien et al., 2013, p. 104). It is possible that retrospective studies with adults about experiences of childhood domestic abuse could complement and extend existing knowledge drawn from children's reports.

2.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter has synthesised the main findings of the current childhood domestic abuse knowledge base. By reviewing the literature through a historical lens, light has been shed on how an overreliance on positivistic paradigms and quantitative research design has generated knowledge about childhood domestic abuse. In highlighting this trend, I argue that knowledge in this field is drawn from what Milner and O'Bryne

(2009, p. 9) refer to as "the forensic gaze". Consequently, the majority of research to date about childhood domestic abuse has cast children as passive, dependent or dangerous victims. More recently, studies from interpretive perspectives have highlighted children as active social agents who resist the perpetration of domestic abuse. However, even most of these studies, as with the earlier research, tend to use prescriptive and narrow definitions of childhood domestic abuse grounded in the physical incident model. I suggest that findings from these studies alone bring into question whether or not the information uncovered by research is reflective of children's understanding of the most important aspects of living with domestic abuse. A new research approach is needed that recognises children as active social agents who are diversely engaged in surviving household gender regimes of power that are inclusive of tactics of coercive control. To accomplish this, I propose an intersectional approach that draws on adults' retrospective experiences of childhood domestic abuse. Adults who have experienced childhood domestic abuse can offer insight into a range of unique experiences that are currently absent from the literature. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the methods I used to address these gaps in the research.

Chapter 3. Researching Adults' Experiences of Childhood Domestic Abuse

In this chapter, I describe the design adopted for this research to achieve the aims and objectives outlined in section 1.3.1. I begin the chapter by outlining the theoretical framework that underpins this study, which consists of an intersectional feminist framework informed by an interpretivist approach. As I argued in the conclusion of Chapter 2, the use of this framework can allow previously untapped experiences of childhood domestic abuse to emerge. In the second section of this chapter, I show how I used a qualitative research design and a narrative methodology to offer participants an opportunity to make meaning of their experiences through the process of storytelling. These first two sections provide the foundation for the third section of the chapter, which outlines the narrative methods used to conduct the research. I present my research process in detail by outlining the recruitment process, interviewing technique, how I constructed the narratives, and how I completed the data analysis. In conclusion, I detail the ethical considerations required to conduct this research in a safe and sensitive manner.

3.1   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1.1 Interpretivism

Interpretive approaches to social inquiry came about as a counter approach to dominant positivist ideas, which suggested that research can explain all forms of reality objectively (Angen, 2000; Crotty, 1998; Engel & Schutt, 2016). Blumer (1969) suggests that four main assumptions inform an interpretive approach. To begin with, an interpretive approach embraces the idea that all elements of society are related to the 'everyday' actions of people. Second, that in these everyday actions there is always room for people to experience autonomy and freedom (Blumer, 1969). This is not to suggest that there are no constraints on people's actions, but rather that there are spaces for agency. Third, that these everyday activities regularly include exchanges with

others, which means that it is often through interpersonal connections that we give meaning to human actions (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). The fourth assumption is that these everyday activities therefore include active negotiation, which influences how we understand and view the world around us. These assumptions resonated deeply with me because they reflected how the children I had worked with talked about their experiences of living with domestic abuse during my time practicing as a counsellor. As such, I could see how an interpretivist approach could benefit the research aims of this study.

Concurrent with an interpretivist viewpoint, my purpose in conducting this research was to understand how people who lived with childhood domestic abuse made sense of their experiences. As such, I was not looking to uncover some objective 'truth' that connects and explains all experiences of childhood domestic abuse. Instead, this study recognises that life, as lived, is not static enough to allow for the certainty often demanded by positivist approaches (Angen, 2000). Using an interpretive approach provided an opportunity to look more deeply into the ways that the participants navigated domestic abuse as something that existed in their childhoods in an everyday way. Focusing on the everyday childhoods of participants from an interpretivist perspective also invited my research to look for acts of agency and resistance in the stories of the survivors who contributed to this study. Moreover, recognising how understanding is connected to relationality encouraged me to consider how relationships influence the meaning of childhood domestic abuse. As such, I was open to the idea that participants made meaning of their experiences of childhood domestic abuse through a process that is constructed and negotiated in cultures, society and relationships with others (Angen, 2000). This recognition of the importance of considering relationships also allowed me to see how meaning was negotiated between myself and the participants during the research process. Consequently, interpretivism helped me to see how the meanings ascribed to actual experiences of childhood domestic abuse are fluid and changing, and therefore that there can be multiple knowledge claims that are sometimes similar, sometimes diverse, and sometimes contradictory. This fluidity and uncertainty sat well with my feminist intersectional framework.

3.2   FEMINIST INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Feminism is a robust theoretical framework that has much to offer studies about domestic abuse. However, in the past decade, many feminists have responded to widespread criticism suggesting that different strains of feminism have not accurately reflected the experiences of some women (Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016; McCall, 2005). Feminists of colour have critiqued the use of women and gender as unitary and homogeneous categories that are representative of the experiences of all women (McCall, 2005, Crenshaw, 1989). These critiques showed that it was not possible to understand black women's experiences merely by combining studies of gender with studies of race because gender studies were based on white women's lives, while race studies were drawn from black men's experiences (McCall, 2005). It became apparent that something new was needed in the research to accurately reflect black women's experiences of gender in the research. I argue that a similar critique applies to studies about children's experiences of domestic abuse.

Children's experiences of domestic abuse have been conflated with that of their mothers in the academic research. The concept of intimate partner violence, domestic abuse that occurs between two adults, has been superimposed on children's experiences. As such, children are positioned as objects impacted by violence that occurs between their parents. This dominant focus in the research is a missed opportunity to understand children as experiencing domestic abuse differently from that of adults through their social location of age, as well as differently from within the category of children through other social locations. A feminist intersectional approach invited me to be interested in relationships of inequality that exist within constituted social groups (McCall, 2005).

By adopting a feminist intersectional approach, I embraced the idea that the wide range of varying experiences, identities and social locations had a significant impact on how individuals experienced similar encounters (McCall, 2005). The point of my research was not to deny the existence of specific categories, but instead to focus on how these categories were produced, experienced, reproduced and resisted by survivors of childhood domestic abuse. It is common in intersectional research for studies to focus on the social locations of gender, race and class (Hankivsky, 2014; McCall, 2005). In doing so, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002) suggests that categories such as gender, class and race become 'anchor points' by which further differences within

and across categories are made visible. However, Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017) suggest that when researching with children, age as a social category can be used as an anchor point. Thus, by focusing on childhood as a unifying intersectional core (McCall, 2005), constituted by the social location of age, and then working outward to analytically unravel how gender, race and class influence the experiences of childhood domestic abuse, I was able to gain new insights into how experiences of domestic abuse may differ within and across the category of children.

Seeking to understand children's previously hidden and complex experiences of domestic abuse corresponds with ongoing feminist research that aims to honour the stories of marginalised groups (McCall, 2005). In my research, I wanted to drill down into participants' everyday experiences of living a childhood that was influenced by domestic abuse. A feminist intersectional approach provided a way for me to move in a different direction from the previous studies, which have confined children's experiences of domestic abuse to disconnected episodes of physical violence. Instead of focusing on occasions of violence, a feminist intersectional framework invited me to look for the various systems of power that operate in children's lives. As Bograd (2005, p. 26) explains, intersectionality does not situate "domestic violence as a monolithic phenomenon", but instead as a varying and complex range of interwoven experiences. Through its focus on relationships of inequality (McCall, 2005), feminist intersectional theory is subtle enough to uncover the operations of power that are the hallmark of a feminist definition of domestic abuse which is inclusive of coercive control (Etherington & Baker, 2016). As such, a feminist intersectional framework was useful for me to gain an insight into previously hidden stories about children's holistic and everyday experiences of domestic abuse that were inclusive of coercive control.

To provide an opportunity for previously untold stories to be revealed, participants needed to be able to have control over the way in which their stories were told. As such, it was necessary to create a research space that allowed participants the freedom to describe and interpret their actions and responses to living with domestic abuse in their own words. In the next section, I argue that this need was served best by a qualitative and narrative methodological approach.

3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN AND NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

3.3.1 A Qualitative Research Approach

To gain new insights into the unique, diverse, complex and enduring phenomenon that is childhood domestic abuse, it was vital for me, as a researcher, to analyse participants' first-hand accounts of living within an everyday context of domestic abuse. A qualitative research approach can be understood as social research whereby the researcher relies on the analysis of textual rather than numerical data to understand the meaning of human action (Carter & Little, 2007; Kim, 2015). The purpose of qualitative research, which is to consider the quality and content of the experiences of people (Mason, 2002), sat comfortably with my own desire to hear stories of experience directly from survivors. Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999, p. 216) state that the aim of qualitative research is:

> to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations […] the researcher attempts to develop understandings of the phenomena under study, based as much as possible on the perspective of those being studied.

In line with the explanation offered by Elliott et al. (1999), I found that by starting with the participants' personal recollections I gained a valuable opportunity to understand the topic of childhood domestic abuse from the perspective of those who had lived and survived the experience.

Speaking directly with survivors about childhood domestic abuse allowed me to hear how their experiences are layered, messy and complex. A qualitative research design provides scope for research to dig into people's stories and gain a depth of understanding that is simply not attainable through the use of quantitative methods. Kim (2015, p. 35) suggests that applying standardised positivist science to complex human interaction, like childhood domestic abuse, is similar to someone asking iPhone's Siri to cry when they become lost on the road. Instead of asking survivors of childhood domestic abuse to map the course of their journey in a descriptive way, I asked them to share their embodied experience of the journey in all its complexity. To accomplish this, I needed an approach that recognised the researcher as embedded in the study rather than as someone who sat outside the research process as a distant observer seeking to pinpoint an objective truth.

Using a qualitative approach to interview adult survivors about their experiences of childhood domestic abuse is a clear departure from the positivist-framed quantitative studies that dominate the literature on this topic (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hague et al., 2012; O'Brien et al., 2013). Positivist approaches assume that the truth of phenomena can be unearthed through value-neutral processes facilitated through the actions of detached and unbiased scientists (Kim, 2015). These assumptions are heavily critiqued by feminist researchers, who argue that it is unrealistic to expect any researcher to be wholly objective, or that a value-free social reality even exists (Kim, 2015). In contrast, a qualitative approach to the study of childhood domestic abuse can uncover the complexity of human elements that are so frequently absent from studies focused on testable observations and standardised knowledge (Kim, 2015). In light of this, social scientists have called for an increase in qualitative research to expand the existing knowledge about the experience of childhood domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Katz, 2014, 2016; McGee, 2000; Mullender & Morley, 2001; Överlien, 2010; Överlien & Hydén, 2009)

A qualitative research approach was therefore well suited to the aims of this project, which sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of childhood domestic abuse in which children are viewed as active social agents.

3.3.2 A Narrative Methodology

For a methodology to be useful in research, it needs to be a coherent set of ideas that connect the philosophy, methods and data that underpin the research process and the kinds of knowledge created as a result of the inquiry (McCall, 2005). As such, methodologies justify the methods that researchers choose to use when completing studies (Carter & Little, 2007). In this section, I show how a narrative methodology enabled me to pull together the essential elements of my feminist intersectional framework and qualitative research design into a congruent set of processes to realise the study's aims.

A narrative methodology appealed to me because I was interested in how people who had gone through childhood domestic abuse would communicate their experiences through stories. A central tenet of a narrative methodology is the belief that people are storytellers who make sense of their worlds through stories (Clandinin

& Rosiek, 2007). I especially wanted to assist people to tell stories about their specific experiences of childhood. I had noticed through my work with children, as well as through reading previous research, that stories of childhood domestic abuse often centre on what other people do. For instance, stories about domestic abuse often depict what fathers, mothers, police and emergency services personnel do, rather than centring on the actions of children. To remedy this, I wanted to create a space that allowed participants to include the types of things that they did when living with domestic abuse as a child. So, I was committed to a methodology that could invite participants to narrate stories that incorporated personal pronouns such as 'I', 'me' and 'mine', rather than 'he', 'hers' or 'their'. This is not to say that stories that highlight relationships and interactions are not important – indeed, a narrative inquiry examines how a story is told, and considers the position of the storyteller, the endpoints, the characters involved, the sequencing of the stories, and the revelation of events (Riley & Hawe, 2004). The key point is that participants direct the telling of the stories and decide what elements of their experiences are important to be heard. This approach signals a break from previous research, which has de-centralised children's experiences by positioning them as witnesses to adult domestic abuse, rather than as subjects at the centre of childhood domestic abuse.

A narrative methodology enabled participants to relate their direct experiences from the centre of the issue of domestic abuse, rather than from the periphery as witnesses to an adult social problem. As such, the voices of participants were privileged by honouring the importance of storytelling (Riessman, 1993). This is a critical consideration when the research topic in which the knowledge and expertise of the people who experience the phenomenon being studied have traditionally been ignored or silenced (Hydén, 2008). Riessman (1993) argues that narrative analysis facilitates the discovery of topics and voices to be included in research that are often overlooked or missed by other methodological approaches by directly engaging with people and their experiences. As such, narrative methodology provided a way to represent the stories of childhood domestic abuse that may have been both excluded from and minimised in the research literature.

In addition to tapping into the subjective experiences of participants, a narrative methodology fitted neatly within a feminist intersectional framework. An aim of this research was to gain insight into how experiences of domestic abuse differ across the

category of 'childhood'. Using a narrative methodology, stories can be thought of as portals "through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). This very act of entering the world through the construction of stories allowed me to be involved with participants as they interpreted and made meaning of their experiences. Through this process, a narrative methodology provided opportunities for broader institutional values and cultural norms to be expressed in language (Riley & Hawes, 2004). It was through such expressions that participants could convey insight into experiences of varying systems of oppression. Creswell (2013) suggests that it is only through talking with people in a way that is unencumbered by what researchers expect to find that more profound levels of detail are achievable. Accordingly, a narrative methodology provided me with a way forward that could illuminate the subjective experiences of individuals through the analysis of the stories they would tell me (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The next section outlines the narrative methods I used when conducting this study.

3.4 METHODS

This section describes the data collection and recruitment processes, the narrative interviews, and the process used to construct the personal experience narratives analysed in this research. I then describe the thematic and narrative analysis, and provide clarity on how I went about writing up my findings. In the final section, I discuss the ethical matters considered throughout the research process.

3.4.1 Data Collection

Recruitment

This study was promoted in a variety of ways to invite people to participate. Flyers were forwarded with letters of introduction to counselling agencies, support services, and community neighbourhood houses for display or distribution (see Appendix A – Promotional Flyer). I posted flyers on various public community noticeboards. I placed public advertisements (see Appendix B – Public Advertisement) in regional, rural and major newspapers across Tasmania. A purpose-built website

provided access to further information about the study (see Appendix C – Information Sheet). The website also facilitated participants contacting me directly via email.

The promotion of the research attracted 28 inquiries about the study – 19 of the people who inquired met the eligibility criteria for sample selection. The selection process limited eligibility to participants who, as children, had lived with fathers or father figures who had perpetrated domestic abuse against mothers. The final sample consisted of one male participant and 18 female participants, ranging in age from 19 to 65 years. The sample size was reduced to a total of 18 after a participant opted to withdraw her data before the analysis phase began.

Fifteen of the participants had lived as children in homes where abuse was perpetrated by fathers, while two had experienced abuse at the hand of stepfathers. Two participants had experienced domestic abuse first by fathers and then later by stepfathers. All of the participants described experiencing tactics congruent with definitions of coercive control during their childhoods. A breakdown of the abuse identified in narratives from across the sample is included in Table 1. The demography of the sample highlights that many participants who contributed to this study would have been unlikely to have met the selection criterion for studies conducted with children. Only one of the eligible participants would have met the requirements to participate in a similar study during their childhood years. Furthermore, the capacity of the sample to identify experiences of coercive control may be attributed to their status as adults. Research conducted by Naughton et al., (2019) show that young people normalised psychological tactics of abuse and coercive control, and therefore struggled to recognise these actions as forms of domestic abuse. This suggests that interviewing adults about experiences of domestic abuse retrospectively may enhance access to previously excluded stories of childhood domestic abuse due to children's inability to provide informed consent to participate, or their difficulty recognising non-physical forms of violence as domestic abuse.

Information sheets (see Appendix C) and consent forms (Appendix D) were made available to all interested parties via the study-specific website, by email, or by post. The information sheets outlined the purpose of the study, anonymity and confidentiality, supervisory details, and the right to withdraw information. Hard copies of the information sheets and consent forms were also provided and discussed at the point of interview. On meeting the participants, I stressed their rights to anonymity

and confidentiality, and their option to withdraw their participation at any time. Each participant was required to sign a consent form before they were able to engage with the study. Participants were given a copy of the information sheet and signed consent form before the interviews.

Narrative Interviews

I used an unstructured and in-depth qualitative method known as 'narrative interviewing' (Bauer, 1996) to generate the participant stories for this research. While I did not see myself as outside the research process, this interviewing technique was adopted to minimise interviewer influence over the direction of the narrative and to hand control of what was to be discussed to the interviewees (Riessman, 1993). According to Bauer (1996), those in control of asking questions ultimately control the interview, which means that data from highly structured interviews can end up revealing more about the interviewer's thoughts on the topic than the storyteller's. Instead of responding to a series of predetermined questions, participants were encouraged to talk generally (Bauer, 1996) about their childhoods in the hope that such conversations would encourage generation of diverse narratives (Riessman, 1993).

The interview process was guided by Bauer's (1996) five stages of a narrative technique for interviewing. These five stages include preparation, initialisation, main narration, questioning, and a small talk phase (Bauer, 1996). The following sections detail how these phases were conducted.

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase requires investigators to become familiar with the field before engaging in interviews (Bauer, 1996). During this phase, agencies across Tasmania, who work with young people recovering from living with domestic abuse, were consulted; and the details of the research proposal were discussed. The proposal was met with positive and encouraging feedback from key stakeholders. The discussions with key stakeholders also influenced the literature reviewed.

Initialisation Phase

The initialisation phase consists of providing participants with information about the interview process, and establishing an open and non-judgemental rapport (Bauer, 1996). As such, time was taken to speak with participants and to clarify that the study

aimed to learn about their everyday experiences of growing up with abusive fathers. Assurances were made to participants that there were no wrong or right answers and that given everyone's experiences are unique, such diversity was welcome in this study.

As to the process of the interviews, I explained that I would not be asking lots of questions but instead asking participants to recall and talk about their childhoods. I explained that I would try not to interrupt them as they spoke and I asked for permission to jot down questions during the interview to ask at the end of their interview. I welcomed them to read these notes at any time as we talked. I clarified that it was not unusual with this type of interview to feel like the topic might be getting 'off track', and promised that I would let them know if we were starting to veer off topic. I added this statement to the initialisation phase after feedback from the first two interviewees indicated that there was a sense of uncertainty about the relevance of some of the stories they narrated. Normalising these feelings and reassuring participants that I would assist them if they were straying from the topic appeared to help relax participants, and invited them to take control of telling their stories in the main narrative phase.

Main Narrative Phase

The main narrative phase of the interview is the time when, as the researcher, I relinquished the bulk of control of the interview to participants. As such, how the question was constructed became a critical element of the research design. I asked participants the single question, "Can you tell me what it was like to live with domestic abuse when you were a child?" Although this appears to be a simply phrased and closed question, it was designed to work in conjunction with the initiation stage to generate long stretches of talk in interviews. According to Hunting (2014), these types of broader questions allow participants an opportunity to speak to the salient intersections in their lives and to reflect the complexity and diversity of experience.

I was also inspired by Christensen and Jensen's (2012, p. 117) challenge to researchers to take "everyday life as a point of departure". So, I used prompts such as "and what did you do then" to encourage participants to place themselves in the stories and narrate their actual experiences, as well as the types of things they recalled seeing or hearing other people do. From my experience working with children as a social

worker and my interpretive epistemology, I felt that it was in the 'everydayness' of experience that stories of power might emerge. Inviting participants to discuss everyday experiences that resonate for them also provides opportunities for the intersections that shape and constrain those experiences to emerge (Bowleg, 2008; Christensen & Jensen, 2012; Hunting, 2014).

Participants signposted the end of their main narration phases by making statements such as "and I think that's it" or "that's about all I have". Once this phase of the interview process was complete, the participant and I both moved to what Bauer (1996) describes as the questioning phase.

Questioning Phase

Verbatim phrases that I had jotted down during the interview were used to seek clarification of points left undeveloped in the main narrative phase. The questioning process sometimes reminded participants of other memories and additional stories were generated before the audio recorder was turned off and we moved into the small talk phase.

Small Talk Phase

After the interviews, many of the participants continued talking once the audio recorder was switched off. Some appeared to gain momentum at this stage and provided heartfelt stories that appeared to need to be told before the opportunity to voice them was lost. Bauer (1996) refers to this part of the interview as the 'small talk phase'. In this phase, participants said things which indicated that the co-construction of a new narrative had been useful for them and made comments such as "I never really realised that before", or "I didn't realise that I felt that way until today", or "that is the first time I have ever told the whole story like that". Information that came to light in the small talk phase was noted in my research journal.

The audio recordings were used to construct personal experience narratives, which became the data that informed this study. The next section explains the process undertaken to construct the personal experience narratives.

3.5   CONSTRUCTING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES

A critical component of addressing the research question underpinning this study was to ensure that participants' narratives were represented in a way that was inclusive of the meaning expressed by the participants. The narrative interviews produced pages and pages of stories saturated with emotion and meaning. As such, the transformation of the raw data to personal experience narratives was a lengthy and meticulous process. Experience-centred narratives are meaningful human accounts that are sequential in time and represent experiences that can include transformation or change (Squire, 2008). To establish the personal experience narratives, the raw data constructed in the interviews underwent a series of reconstructions (McCormack, 2004).

The first reconstruction occurred during the interview phase. In this phase, the participants and I co-constructed stories that detailed experiences of their childhoods. These texts were then transcribed into 'field texts'. The second reconstruction took place when the field texts where transformed into 'interim research texts' (McCormack, 2004). The final reconstruction consisted of the co-creation of 'personal experience narratives' between the participants and myself as the research through the member checking process (see section 3.4.3, below). Each of these three reconstructions was a step in producing the final 18 personal event narratives that I analysed in the course of this research. These reconstructions will now be outlined in more detail.

3.5.1 Creating Field Text

Field texts are completed transcriptions from individual narrative interviews (McCormack, 2004). I created the field texts by personally transcribing the 19 audio-recorded interviews. As documents, the completed field texts ranged from 8,300 to 22,000 words in length, averaging 15,000 words per interview. The stories contained within the field texts were often emotive and sometimes existed on the edges of participants' old and deep wounds. Meanings inherent in field texts were conveyed by participants' words, but also in the silences and other actions that accompanied their speech. I was determined to create strong transcriptive accounts in the field texts and so I followed McCosker, Banard and Gerber's (2001) suggestion to include elements

that capture the intent of participants by gathering both the words spoken and how the spoken word came to life in the act of speaking.

During the transcription process, I listened carefully for any cues that indicated emotion in the way stories were spoken and I included this detail in the field texts. For example, each interview was transcribed in its entirety, verbatim, including all stops and false starts. Non-verbal information was recorded in the transcripts by adding dashes to indicate pauses and significant breaks in the conversation were recorded as [pause] and [long pause]. Gestures, such as a participant slamming her hand down on the desk to emphasise a point in the story were also captured in the transcripts. At one point in an interview, a participant reached out, took my arm and applied pressure to show how her father might silently convey a threat. I included each of these actions in the field texts. According to Riessman (1993 p. 58), "by transcribing at this level, interpretive categories emerge, ambiguities in language are heard on the tape, and the oral record – the way the story is told – provides clues about meaning". I was careful in how I constructed the field texts from the recorded interviews because I wanted to convey the way in which I had heard the stories and how I had interpreted the emotion in the telling of the stories. This approach is congruent with Riessman (1993), who states that the thoughtful investigator does not assume that language alone is transparent.

Adding the non-verbal aspects of interviews during the transcription process influenced how meaning was conveyed in the field texts. Without these details, some of the meaning inherent in the act of storytelling can become lost. I also used notes from my research journal to add descriptions of visual aspects that had been noted during and after the interview process. For example, descriptions of when participants had mimed actions or formed facial expressions to convey an action or character were transferred from the research journal to the transcriptions. Alternatively, notes that indicated the emotiveness of the interview, such as a single tear rolling down the face of a participant were also documented in the journal and added to the transcript.

After each interview was transcribed, I replayed the audio recording and checked it against the transcript for accuracy. During this process, all the characters mentioned in the narratives were given pseudonyms and placenames and other identifying information were changed to de-identify participants. I recorded all the pseudonyms next to the real names in a separate Word document. I also scanned the field texts for

information such as age, family position, types of abuse experienced, whether the violence was perpetrated by fathers or step-fathers, direct abuse experiences (child abuse), sexual abuse, and whether the participant had accessed any formal counselling throughout their lives. This information was recorded in the same table as the pseudonyms.

On re-reading the completed field texts, it became apparent that these documents had developed in a non-linear way, and that the transcripts comprised of a variety of often disconnected stories that were "typically long, full of asides, comments, flashbacks, flash-forwards, orientation and evaluations" (Riessman, 1993, p. 43). Throughout the interviews, participants had zigzagged through their life experiences, flitting back and forth across a timeline as they remembered more of a previously narrated story, or sought to provide background and context for a new story. Mishler (1995, p. 89) refers to this element of narrative analysis as "the order of the told", and distinguishes this from "the order of the telling", which refers to the way researchers reform the narrative events and actions before presenting them as texts in research. It was clear from even the most cursory reading of the field texts that further shaping was required to transform these texts into more readable documents. The next section explains the process I took to reconstruct the field texts (the order of the told) into interim research texts (the order of the telling).

3.5.2 Creating Interim Research Texts

In the research process, interim research texts sit in the space between the field texts and published research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interim texts prepare the field texts to be of use with a broader audience (Clandinin, 2006). As such, the interim research texts served as a middle step in the quest to co-create personal experience narratives (see Figure 1, below).

Field Texts:

Verbatim transcriptions of interviews including field notes from researcher's journal.

Interim Research Texts:

Selected stories and narrative processes extracted from field texts, temporarily ordered with beginning, middle and ending, cleaned up speech, title assignment and researcher's interpretations included.

Personal Experience Narrative:

Participants' temporally ordered stories with researcher's interpretations and any additionally information added by participants during the member-checking process.
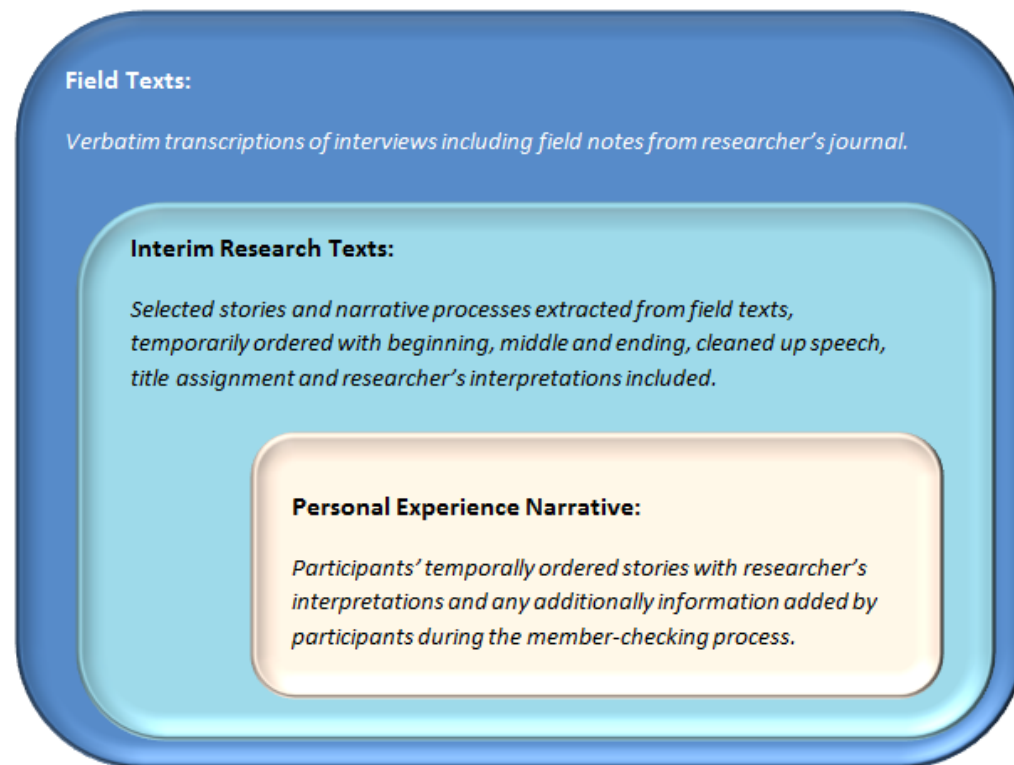
Figure 1. Personal experience narrative construction

The first step I took to construct interim texts was to carefully read the field texts to identify and locate 'stories'. The terms 'story' and 'narrative' are often used interchangeably (Kim, 2015; Riley & Hawes, 2004), but these terms are analytically different (Riley & Hawes, 2004). Frank (2000) explains that people tell stories, while narratives are the result of the analysis of stories. Thus, stories are ordered in a particular way to produce a narrative. A story is an event or occurrence placed in a narrative to persuade or convince a listener of a particular point of view or experience. Riessman (1993) also offers a useful explanation of the difference between stories and narratives, suggesting that "narrative is an encompassing term of rhetoric, whereas 'story' is a limited genre" (Riessman, 1993). As such, stories can be considered the basic building blocks of narratives (Franzosi, 1998).

Locating Stories

Locating stories from amongst other spoken elements in oral narratives is not a clear process (Kim, 2015). However, it is an essential task in constructing narratives (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Riessman, 1993, 2002), for without stories there can be no narrative (Franzosi, 1998).

To locate stories, I carefully read and re-read each of the field texts looking for passages that were indicative of structured stories. Stories can be differentiated from surrounding texts by recognisable boundaries that signal a beginning, middle and end (McCormack, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The research texts were scanned for phrases that foregrounded the commencement of a story, and for closing comments that signalled its conclusion. I located and extracted distinct stories from field text before copying and pasting them into a new Microsoft Word document for each participant, named with their pseudonym. The resulting document was a collection of disconnected and isolated stories. To shape these stories into a more cohesive representation of an interim text, I directed my attention to enhancing their readability.

Enhancing Readability

One of the goals for creating interim texts was to improve the readability of field texts and to lay bare the various experiences of childhood domestic abuse under study. The stop-and-start style inherent in oral stories was carefully rearranged and pasted together for more explicit communication (Riessman, 1993). To get a sense of the trajectory of experience, stories were arranged chronologically. For example, I paid attention to information such as age, or new living location or school attendance that corresponded to age, and used this information to place stories in a chronological sequence. By ordering stories chronologically, the interim research texts developed into what Mishler (1995, p. 90) describes as "a series of temporally ordered events". The chronological ordering of stories significantly improved the readability of the interim texts, and overarching narratives began to take shape.

I also decided to 'clean up' the interim research texts to improve readability. This involved removing some of the marks included in the transcripts to indicate pauses, and some of the excessive 'you knows' and 'ums' detracting from the readability of the interim texts. The decision to modify the interim texts in this way was prompted by other narrative researchers (Burrill, 2015; McCormack, 2004) who had documented how participants, who had received copies of narratives to check there accuracy, had become focused on the appearance of the verbatim text to the possible detriment of checking the content and meaning implied in the text. These collections of temporally ordered stories extracted from the transcripts became the skeleton of each participant's narrative (Franzosi, 1998). However, there were still many valuable texts that

remained in the field text documents after the stories had been transferred to the interim field texts. Although these narrative elements were not stories, they held the potential to enhance or augment the stories already included in the developing narrative.

Augmenting Stories

Once relevant and distinct stories had been located, extracted, chronologically ordered and the text tidied up, the developing interim texts were appraised for any other narrative process that had not been neatly represented as a distinct story. McCormack (2004, p. 222) classifies these narrative processes as "argumentations, augmentations, theorising and description". Thus, passages that were not distinct stories but which enhanced or developed the telling of stories were added to the interim research texts. These augmentations usually came from clarifying questions asked at the end of the interview, or from accounts in the transcript which I later realised were flashbacks to earlier stories. The addition of narrative processes such as flashbacks, side narratives and asides added to the complexity of the interim research texts (McCormack, 2004).

In the process of ordering the 'told' into the 'telling', the narrative structure across each of the interim research texts began to take shape. When the stories were pieced together in chronological order, they each formed a narrative that spoke of experiences of childhood domestic abuse. It was possible, even in this early stage of the research, to notice patterns emerging across the narratives.

Adding Reflections

Once the interim texts containing the chronologically ordered stories aligned with the other narrative elements that provided depth and clarity, I added my reflections as the researcher. I typed my interpretations, comments, and sometimes questions, into the spaces between quotes. The point of adding my voice to the interim research texts was to invite participants, at the member checking phase, to assess my understanding of 'the order of the telling', to minimise misinterpretation of their data and to extend the co-construction of the stories. The final step in preparing the interim research texts was to add headings that signposted changes in stories to further enhance the readability of the texts before they were returned to participants.

Naming Stories

I finalised the interim texts by giving a title to each story contained in the individual narratives. These titles were drawn from direct quotes contained in each of the stories and served to highlight my interpretation of the main contribution of the story in the narrative. Table 1, below, shows an outline of the narrative structure. Once the interim research texts were completed, they were returned to participants for member checking.

Table 1. Personal Narrative Structure

The Beginning
First Memories of Domestic Abuse
Introducing Fathers
Introducing Mothers
The Middle
Living with Childhood Domestic Abuse
Experiences
Complicating Actions
Responses
Protective Strategies
Opposing Strategies
The End
Finding Closure
Preferred Future

3.5.3 Member Checking

The interim research texts were returned to participants via email, hand delivery and post. Participants were invited to read, change, add to, or provide feedback on any part of the interim text. Borrowing from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, p. 148) work, I asked participants to consider the following questions: "Is this you?"; "Do you see yourself here?"; and "Is this the character you want to be when others read this?" As in McCormack's (2004) work, participants were also reminded at this point that they could remove or change aspects of the texts at will. Riessman (1993) stresses that

inviting participants to review their narrative is an essential step in developing trustworthiness in the research process and can add to theoretical insights. However, given the sensitive nature of the content of this study, interim research texts were only sent to those participants who had indicated they wanted to review the data. Three of the participants indicated that they preferred not to review their narratives.

Most of the participants who engaged in the member checking process did not make changes to the texts and forwarded feedback to me indicating they were happy with their story constructions. As expected, and although forewarned, many participants were surprised by the verbatim transcriptions of their stories and made comments or apologies about their verbal expression and repetitiveness. One of the participants made considerable editorial changes to the readability of her narrative but no changes to the content. As mentioned earlier, one participant who after reading her narrative, agreed it was an accurate representation of her story but felt she could no longer be part of the research because the narration evoked a feeling of disloyalty to her parents. Her narrative was very powerful and represented the childhood of a woman who had kept her story to herself for 50 years. I was saddened that the study would not benefit from her account but I was equally pleased that she felt able to make choices about who read her story.

On the completion of the member checking phase, the interim research texts were adapted in line with participant feedback and became the personal experience narratives used for further analysis. The following section outlines the data analysis undertaken in the process of knowledge creation.

3.6   THEMATIC AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The process of constructing personal experience narratives created a strong foundation for the data analysis phase. During the process of co-constructing narratives with participants, a picture had begun to emerge of shared experiences of domestic abuse across the narratives, in addition to how experiences were also diverse. It became clear that presenting either of these data sets alone would detract from the findings. Thus, I decided to use a two-pronged approach to narrative analysis to gain an understanding of these two different elements of the narratives.

Polkinghorne (1995) discusses two ways of approaching the task of conducting a narrative analysis. These approaches fall into two loosely divided narrative inquiry

frameworks known as 'analysis of narrative' and 'narrative analysis' (Polkinghorne, 1995; McCormack, 2004). Analysis of narrative is the process of locating stories as 'data', and examines those stories for themes, typologies or instances of paradigmatic categories that exist across participants' stories (McCormack, 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 2012). This process of analysis closely aligns with grounded theory analysis (Kalnins et al., 2002) as patterns in the narratives are derived inductively and grouped together by putting themes together 'like with like'. The purpose of conducting this type of analysis was to establish a shared understanding from the perspective of survivors about what it was like to live in domestically abusive families as children. By conducting this analysis, I was interested in seeing what types of experiences participants would include most often in their narratives. I was interested to know whether narratives would be reflective of the previous literature, meaning that they would focus on incidents of physical abuse, with participants discussing their involvement predominantly in terms of being passive witnesses.

In addition to conducting a thematic analysis of the narratives, I also wanted to delve more deeply into the process of narrative inquiry by closely examining the events and actions of individual narratives through the process of 'emplotment' (McCormack, 2004). Here, I was interested in gaining an understanding of any changes that occurred in narratives over time as new experiences were gained and social interactions became more varied. So, while the thematic analysis of the narratives could provide information about different themes that arose as a result of childhood experiences of domestic abuse, this method did not help me to understand how time transformed the interpretation of experiences, social locations, or systems of oppression. Riley and Hawes (2004) argue that the narrative inquirer's focus on contextualising the sensemaking process, rather than solely on a set of themes, is an important methodological distinction of narrative inquiry.

By utilising both thematic and structural narrative analysis methods, I gained an in-depth understanding of participants' shared experiences as well as their individualised and diverse accounts of childhood domestic abuse. The next two sections describe the data analysis processes used to conduct a thematic analysis and those I used to complete the structural narrative analysis.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis of Narrative

The thematic analysis process I used in this study aligns with Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narratives, whereby common themes or conceptual manifestations are identified in stories and grouped by repetitive appearances. According to Kim (2015), qualitative researchers employ this method of narrative analysis to focus on the discovery of common themes, and organise them under categories using stories as data. In this study, this method was useful for highlighting common experiences within the category of childhood that have been largely absent from the literature to date. Examples of this include experiencing domestic abuse as a pervasive and enduring context and children engaging actively within this context.

To organise the data thematically, each personal experience narrative was entered in its entirety into the MAXQDA 12 qualitative data analysis software. Narratives were carefully read and re-read with the express purpose of identifying and assigning codes to the completed stories existing with the narratives. In this phase, analysis and interpretation are linked as researchers analyse data in order to develop an understanding of meanings that participants give to themselves, their environments and their lived experiences through the telling of stories (Kim, 2015). However, as Riessman (1993, p. 43) writes, "it is naïve to think that one can 'just present the story' without some systematic method of reduction". As such, no matter how compelling personal experience narratives are, there is a need for researchers to "fight against our desire to let [the narratives] speak for themselves", and must instead discover and construct meaning through further analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 130). One critical element in the process of discovering meaning is the process of coding.

Coding

Codes were assigned to stories through the process of several re-readings of each narrative. Large sections of interview excerpts were coded to ensure stories remained embedded within the context of the narrative (Kim, 2015). Coding large sections of texts sometimes required the same texts to be assigned to two or more codes because the text spoke to multiple themes. Each narrative was read and re-read until no further codes could be added. This process generated a list of over 100 differently coded stories.

Once all the personal narratives had been coded, I returned to the first personal experience narrative and proceeded to code them again in light of the new codes that had emerged during my first pass over the narratives for coding. This process generated a long list of codes that were examined for ways they related to each other and which were brought together under sub-headings of basic themes.

Creating Basic and Overarching Themes

To create basic themes, I looked at the codes most frequently used. Where codes contained 10 or more comments they were included as basic themes. The four most common basic themes to emerge from the coding process were 'introducing fathers', 'assigning responsibility to mothers', 'resisting violence and abuse', and 'experiencing coercive control'. I worked through the codes, reading the coded text for ways that codes might link with other codes. For example, 'introducing fathers' and 'assigning responsibility to mothers' were grouped with other basic themes indicative of how participants narrated stories of their relational engagement in a gendered dynamic of abuse. Through grouping more codes, this basic theme evolved into the overarching theme of Chapter 4, which is titled 'Children Relationally Engaged in Gendered Dynamics of Abuse'. At the end of the process of organising codes, I was left with three key overarching themes that became the focus for the first three findings chapters. I elaborate on the writing up of these findings later in this chapter.

Using a narrative analysis approach allowed me to look across the stories of participants and locate themes that indicated their shared experiences of childhood domestic abuse. However, the complexities of everyday lives were simplified in this process and many of the diverse experiences of individuals were lost (McCormack, 2004). In particular, factors that influenced experiences of childhood domestic abuse, such as gender, age, class and race, were not picked up because they were often implicit in narratives rather than being mentioned explicitly. Therefore, these themes did not rise to the top during the thematic data analysis process and would have been excluded from the findings without further analysis. To avoid omitting this information from the study, I used a structural narrative analysis to complement the thematic analysis.

3.6.2 Structural Narrative Analysis

The structural analysis of narratives provided insight into intersections of social location and systems of oppression. After reading all the narratives for themes that connected experiences across narratives, I looked again at the narratives and this time I examined individual cases for experiences that illustrated the broader social locations embodied by each of the participants. Working from their common social location within the category of child as a result of their age, I searched for other hidden or less overt signals of further categorisation, such as race, class and gender. In doing so, I pulled at the narratives in places that expanded on the master category of 'child', which yielded experiences that highlighted intersecting categories. Unlike the thematic analysis process, these themes did not have to appear frequently within the personal experience narratives. Without this direction of analysis, the study was at risk of homogenising all children's experiences and failing to draw out the complexities that different children navigate when living with domestic abuse. Without a structural narrative analysis of intersecting factors, only a partial perspective from the dominant category of the research would be revealed by the analysis. For example, in Sarah's narrative, the intersecting factors of gender, class and race/ethnicity would have been ignored, and therefore the uniqueness of her experience would not have been fully represented by the research findings.

The process of reading narratives from a holistic content analysis perspective allowed me to piece together how participants' experiences were multi-dimensional and diverse. As I was interested in the multiplicity of participants' experiences, I examined narratives through an intersectional lens to recognise and code stories along the lines of social identity and experiences of systems of oppression. I used an intersectionality diagram developed by the Western Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children (see Figure 2, below) (as cited in (VAW Learning Network, 2015) to construct a list of codes and then I read the personal experience narratives with a view to identifying structural forces, types of discrimination, and aspects of identity. Hunting (2014) states that researchers need a well-thought-through rationale of possible intersections that could occur in the data to avoid overlooking important social locations. As a researcher, I needed to be aware of the structuring of inequalities in the wider society (Christoffersen, 2017).

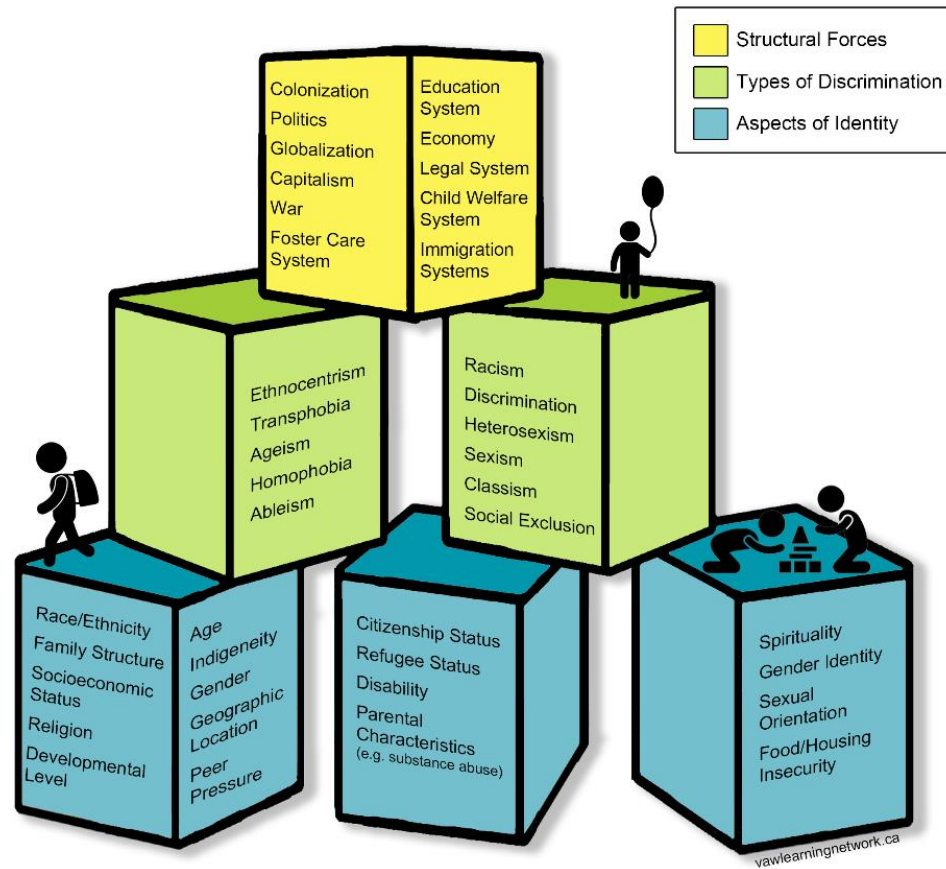## Children's Unique Circumstances of Power, Privilege and Identity

Figure 2. Children's Unique Circumstances of Power, Privilege and Identity (VAW Learning Network, 2015)

To assess for intersectionality, I created a new file in MAXQDA 12 and reviewed the narratives for stories that referenced structural forces, types of discrimination and aspects of identity. This approach indicated a swing away from the inductive approach used thus far in the data analysis and towards a deductive approach that attempted to make connections between the individual accounts of participants' social locations and the broader social relations detailed in their narratives. According to Bowleg (2008, p. 321), such a deductive method is integral to an intersectional approach because researchers "bear the responsibility for interpreting their data within the context of socio-historical and structural inequality" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 321) to make visible hidden or overlooked factors that shape lived experience (Hunting, 2014). As with the thematic analysis, I applied multiple codes to the same pieces of text when points of intersection occurred. This coding process gave me insight into the many ways that systems of discrimination and social locations overlapped and influenced

participants' experiences of childhood domestic abuse. However, it did not yield much data about how participants experienced privilege or reprieve from oppression.

From the deep familiarity I had developed with the narratives, I knew that experiences of privilege were implicit in the data. However, because these experiences were not made explicit through references to social location or systems of oppression, they had not been picked up when I coded the data. I also realised that, as a white, middle-class woman, I had been blind to many of the ways privilege had manifested in the narratives until I was reading experiences of racism and classism of participants who had lived in severe poverty and those who did not identify as white. I returned to the narratives and reread them, but this time I looked for stories that contrasted with the stories of oppression. For example, in the data I had coded there were stories where participants had narrated their experiences of school as a place where age, race and class intersected to constrain their agency and compound their social isolation. I looked for experiences that highlighted how the participants' lived experiences of domestic abuse were differently affected by intersections of age, race, class, kinship and gender. As an analyst, I attended to the task of making meaning of participants' intersections, even when they had not explicitly named them. According to Bowleg (2008, p. 321), "the intersectionality researcher must be able to analyse research findings within a macro sociohistorical context that transcends the observed data". I therefore used coding processes to drill down into intersecting experiences to gain a holistic understanding of how children experience childhood domestic abuse differently depending on their social locations and exposure to varying systems of oppression.

I was more confident when I came to approach the structural narrative analysis stage. Although I often found something new in each reading of the narratives, I felt that through immersing myself in the data I had developed a keen understanding of what each participant was conveying through their narrations. Furthermore, as a result of the member-checking process, I had also developed some confidence in applying my own informed interpretation of the stories.

3.6.3 Writing Up Findings

The analysis generated by this study produced four findings chapters. In this section, I detail how I went about writing up the results in a way that was consistent with the methodology of this research.

The accounts presented in Chapter 4 contain themes that emerged early in the narratives. In a process of setting the scene for the stories that were to follow, participants often used the beginnings of their narratives to introduce the main characters that were to feature in subsequent stories. Riessman and Quinney (2005) argue that it is important for narrative inquiries to establish an understanding of the characters and the complexity of the setting. The overarching theme of Chapter 4 was 'Children Relationally Engaged in Gendered Dynamics of Abuse', which encompassed the basic themes *Mothers: Morally Deficient and Responsible*, *Respected but Abusive Fathers*, and *Relational Support Systems*. The strength of this chapter is the awareness it brings to how children are active and relationally engaged in gendered regimes of household abuse.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 are centred within the overarching theme of *Experiencing Childhood Domestic Abuse as a Child*. The basic themes explored in the chapter include *Sensory Experiences of Childhood Domestic Abuse*, *Childhood Experiences of Coercive Control*, and *Experiencing Entrapment: Tactics of Isolation*. The findings in Chapter 5 give an in-depth account of how participants experienced a broad range of tactics of abuse. In doing so, the chapter provides a foundation for understanding the different ways participants responded to this varied context of abuse.

Chapter 6 is entitled 'Responding to Childhood Domestic Abuse', and outlines accounts showing the different strategies participants' used during their childhoods to respond to and resist domestic abuse. The overarching theme of the chapter is informed by two basic themes, *Using Protective Strategies*, and *Using Opposing Strategies*. The chapter challenges the idea that children are passive recipients of childhood domestic abuse by laying bare the multitude of ways in which children actively respond when living in an everyday context of domestic abuse.

The final findings chapter presents accounts that are derived from the structural narrative analysis. The findings presented draw on the emplotment of narratives. That is how, over time, the narratives performed a purpose. I show how different turning

points in the narratives are indicative of a shift in how participants made meaning of their experiences of living with domestic abuse. These turning points include *Experiencing Non-abusive Family Life*, and valuable interactions with *One Significant Person*. These findings highlight how meaning that is attached to domestic abuse influences the ways in which children respond. In this chapter, I also present how varying social locations and systems of oppression both constrained and enabled the participants' experiences of childhood domestic abuse within the category of child. I explore how intersections of age, class and race operate against a backdrop of gendered violence to reveal how children's agency is affected by intersecting forces.

The writing up process required a reflective stance on the part of the researcher to ensure the fundamental values that govern human research were being adhered to. As with all stages of this research process, the choice and placement of themes in the findings chapters was guided by ethical considerations. Few would dispute that such considerations are necessary when conducting research. However, when the topic is of a sensitive nature, as in this study, such factors become crucial (Paavilainen, Lepistö, & Flinck, 2014). According to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (NHMRC, 2007), four fundamental values are essential for human research: research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect. In the next section, I discuss how these core values were addressed in this research to ensure ethical integrity.

3.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.7.1 Impact on the Researcher

Studying sensitive topics has the potential to affect the psychological wellbeing of the researcher, as well as the participants. Many of the stories discussed in the conduct of this research were graphic descriptions of unsettling, heart-rending and terrifying events. I encountered these stories numerous times throughout the interviews, the transcribing process, data analysis, and writing up. This exposure to vicarious trauma is a testament to the importance of regular debriefing for researchers (McCosker et al., 2001). I found the opportunity to speak with colleagues who had also conducted sensitive research to be invaluable. Having access to the opportunity to discuss the impact of the research interviews with supervisors was at times more

important for my psychological and emotional safety than for discussing the interview content.

As an experienced social worker who engages in counselling, I was accustomed to hearing stories of pain, suffering and heartache. However, as a researcher I was unprepared for how impactful constant exposure to these stories would be. I found that to maintain a position of 'not knowing' and of being open to sitting with uncertainty during the interview processes, it was necessary that I be in a condition where I was able to hear stories of tragedy, cruelty and oppression. I found listening to adults reflect on the fear, hurt and loss they experienced as children to be personally challenging. However, it was only through hearing and acknowledging these stories that hidden stories of survival and resistance were able to emerge.

A commitment to not knowing and an ability to position participants as experts in their own lives also enabled me to gain an understanding of how impactful everyday aspects of living with domestic abuse were for participants. Ruch (2014) argues that, for researchers to maintain such alertness and attentiveness, it is necessary that they be willing to become vulnerable themselves through exposure to the challenging experiences presented in conducting sensitive research. This was particularly important for me as topics came up which challenged my worldview as a feminist practitioner, such as mother-blaming. As with the well-known protocol of carers fixing their own oxygen masks before assisting their charges, the same principle applies when researching sensitive topics. Without researchers considering self-care, expectations that research will deliver beneficence are unreasonable.

3.7.2 Beneficence

Beneficence refers to the weighing up of the potential harm in conducting research with the benefits afforded by its completion (Habibis, 2010). The concept of beneficence is located at the heart of much social work research (Ruch, 2014). This research, as is often the case with social work research (Ruch, 2014), was motivated by an emancipatory stance. Consideration of the ways this research would be beneficial were instrumental in every aspect of its design. These benefits included, but were not limited to, practical outcomes in the form of the reconstruction of discourse regarding survivors, policy development, and practice improvements. However, from

the start, I was also mindful of the possibility of less tangible benefits arising out of the research process itself.

I was acutely aware throughout the entire project that I was asking participants to remember experiences of living in adverse conditions. I recognised that this request had the potential to evoke discomfort induced by the interview content in the form of feelings of distress, guilt, anger or fear. However, I was also conscious that participants who had experienced domestic abuse could find the telling of their stories liberating and think of them as a way of taking action (Peled, 2001). Acknowledging this possibility, I worked extensively with each participant to ensure they could feel in control of what they chose to discuss and that I was open to hearing whatever that might be. Dietz (2000, p. 376) suggests that the process of telling one's story to an empathic listener who can validate their oppression and abuse can aid in the healing process. With Dietz's comments in mind, I prompted participants to talk about their experiences of domestic abuse, including the ways they were active against and resistant to domestic abuse. Placing people in positions of power over their life story provides them with control and has been shown to minimise distress (White, 2005).

When people are invited to observe their life stories from a position other than that of the victim, it can increase self-worth and assist with recovery (White, 2005; Yuen, 2007). These effects were evident in the small talk that occurred following the interviews and in emails I received in the member checking stage. Remarkably, one participant chose to change her name to her pseudonym in the study in reaction to the strength portrayed in her narrative. Another stated, "I needed you when I was a kid. My little me says thank you so much". Echoing these comments, one of the participants stated that:

> *telling it all in one hit like that, I did feel like a big dump of stuff I held onto and had never been given a chance to tell it distinctly like that before. It was like someone finally listened to the child in me.*

These comments serve to highlight the extent to which participants opened themselves up to being vulnerable. When asking participants to give so much of themselves, researchers have a responsibility to assess the risks inherent in such research, and to endeavour to minimise harm.

3.8   CONCLUSION

This chapter has clarified the study's purpose and provided transparency as to the assumptions underpinning the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques used to derive the findings. I have explained my research methodology and shown how I used feminist intersectional theory and narrative inquiry methods to build a research design sensitive to the diverse experiences of people who lived in domestically violent homes as children. Narrative methods for data collection and analysis have been justified as a way of complementing the predominantly quantitative approaches already undertaken in this field. I have shown how I drew on the works of Clandinin (2013), Riessman (1993) and McCormack (2004) as guiding examples of narrative methodologies and methods. The chapter finishes by summing up how the research design was carefully considered to ensure it was ethically sound. In the next four chapters, I elaborate on the accounts drawn from the research process outlined above.

Chapter 4. Children Relationally Engaged in Gendered Dynamics of Abuse

This chapter is the first of four findings chapters, the content of which emerged from analysis of participants' narratives about their experience of childhood domestic abuse. Throughout the narratives, participants spoke about the importance of relationships and connections with immediate family, members of their broader family, and friendships. Such findings are unsurprising given that families are sites of multilayered relationships that fold over each other in similar ways to geological strata (Connell, 1987). However, to date, there has been little research exploring children's lived experiences of relationships when living in domestically abusive families (Callaghan et al, 2016). Instead, children are often viewed as passive recipients of relationships rather than active agents who contribute to the shaping of families (Callaghan et al, 2016). The findings presented in this chapter contribute to the childhood domestic abuse literature by adding the largely absent voice of survivors (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Callaghan et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2013) and providing insight into how survivors understand their relational worlds. I argue that these findings challenge the dominant representation of children as passive and relationally ineffective (Callaghan et al., 2016). Instead, I present evidence that demonstrates how social constructions of age and gender intersect to influence children's relational engagement with parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends.

The basic theme reported in this section is of participants' reports of how '*gendered dynamics of abuse*' unsettle family attributes of love, security, safety and protection. I draw on the work of Morris (2009) to show how the operation of gender regimes in domestically abusive homes disrupts and distorts intimate family relationships. However, despite this discord, the participants described engaging with families, friends and others; and the ways these relationships influenced how they made sense of their experiences of domestic abuse. Four sub-themes inform these findings. Section 4.1.1, '*Mothers: morally deficient and responsible*', shows how participants draw on gendered stereotypes of women to assign responsibility for abuse to mothers through their failure to safeguard families. Conversely, section 4.1.2,

'*Respected but abusive fathers: Victims of social pressures*, shows how participants drew on gendered discourses that elevate fathers to a privileged status with a moral authority that eschews responsibility for their abusive behaviours. These first two subthemes set the scene for how environments of childhood domestic abuse are sites of household gender regimes. Drawing on this as a standpoint, I then show findings that reveal how children are actively and relationally engaged in these gendered sites through their provision of, and access to, systems of relational support.

4.1   GENDERED DYNAMICS OF ABUSE IN FAMILIES

Relationships with parents strongly influence how survivors make sense of domestic abuse (Katz, 2014; Callaghan et al, 2016; Morris, 2009; Naughton et al., 2019; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). The findings from this study show that participants' experiences of domestic abuse are relationally embedded in gender regimes (Connell, 1987; Morris, 2009). The gender regime of a particular family represents the synthesis of relationships governed by emotional relations, power and the division of labour (Connell, 1987). The findings presented below show how deliberate strategies are used by perpetrators to inflate their power and position in families, while at the same time mothers are positioned as deficient, untrustworthy and culpable (Morris, 2009). These strategies gain traction because of their congruence with gender stereotypes that exist at macro-levels in society and meso-levels in organisations and institutions (Morris, 2009).

The impact of gender regimes was evident in the findings from this study when participants identified the systematic weaving of abuse into the everyday lives of mothers and children. For example, Sam discussed what she calls "*the power dynamic between my mum and dad*" and describes this pattern of behaviour as "*how dad has sort of subtly put mum down over the years*". Sam's comments show how her father, through the use of psychological abuse, diminishes her mother's standing through comments that lessen her sense of importance as a person. The very act of Sam's father assuming the right to assess and critique her mother shows how Sam's father elevates himself to a higher position in the family hierarchy as a person who can and does define the acceptability of Sam's mother.

In addition to the repetitive and consistent pattern of character assassination, Sam's father also attributed responsibility for the violence he enacted to her mother. Sam elaborates:

I just remember him and mum getting into this argument, and then him getting really angry and up-turning, ('cause we were sitting at the table having dinner), and up-turning the whole table with everything on it. With food and plates and everything, smashing to the floor. And there being a big mess everywhere. And then he got angry that he did that and— But he blamed mum for it. Rather than going, "Shit, look what I have done", it was mum's fault. "You made me do it!"

In the scenario Sam describes, her father depicts himself as a victim who has inadvertently enacted violence because of the actions of Sam's mother. Morris's (2009) work on maternal alienation provides a lens through which childhood domestic abuse is understood as including a range of tactics used by perpetrators to undermine and disrupt relationships between mothers and children. Morris (2009) proposes that perpetrators enact maternal alienation by engaging a repertoire of coercive strategies that shield perpetrators from responsibility for violence, while at the same time discrediting mothers who are parenting children within an abusive family environment.

In the next two sections, I present more detailed findings that highlight households as gender regimes in which maternal alienation is a tactic of domestic abuse used by perpetrators to dismantle mother–child relationships and to isolate both children and mothers.

4.1.1 Mothers: Morally Deficient and Responsible

The impact of gender regimes is evident in the way participants elevate their fathers to the position of a central character in their stories of childhood domestic abuse. Many of the participants commenced narratives by introducing their fathers as a principal or central figure in their lives. Mothers, on the other hand, were represented as more subsidiary and supporting characters. For instance, Anna stated:

I mean obviously extreme incidents are going to stand out in your memory, and therefore I remember my father in a certain way. And

memories of my mother maybe don't rate by comparison. You know, mum was always there, and she was always doing stuff for people. Looking after people.

In this quote, the character of mother appears almost incidentally. Indeed, it was very common for survivors to describe their mothers as bland, unemotional and unremarkable. One participant stated that if she were to describe her mother as a colour, it would be a "*very pale, pale pink*" (Ellen). This fading out of mothers as key characters in narratives is indicative of what Stark (2007, p. 228) describes as "distal effects" of coercion and control, whereby the means and effects of control merge with behaviours widely associated with women's devalued status. As a consequence, mothers' characters manifest as deferential and unnoticed.

Stark's (2007) concept of the distal effect is also identifiable in descriptions of mothers that reflect patriarchal notions. For example, many participants, as demonstrated in the above quote from Anna, appeared to take for granted their mother's role as family caretaker. Ellen provides such an instance in the following description of her mother:

She looked after us girls, but— but yeah, and she was never overly affectionate either, once we sort of got a bit older, but then we probably weren't either, I don't know. Yeah. We got along with mum fine, and she looked after us— but, yeah [fades out].

From this short passage, the oppressive nature of domestic abuse is present in Ellen's story. It is clear that Ellen accepts as a given that her mother would fulfil the caretaker role, because "*she looked after us girls, but—*". The use of the conjunction 'but' is suggestive of an underlying idea that being looked after by a mother is to be expected yet is not sufficient on its own. Ellen's comment about her mother's lack of affection extends this idea and suggests a traditional feminised caretaking in which the 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1979) for the family is primarily the responsibility of mothers. Not only are mothers supposed to provide care to children, but they must also perform this role affectionately. To not provide such care renders mothers as deficient in their expected roles. This taken-for-granted assumption of women's roles can make the work of mother 'invisible' or depict it in ways that do not take the complexities and challenges of the task into account (Lapierre, 2010).

Research shows that women strive to be 'good' mothers, but domestic abuse adds an additional layer that complicates a mother's ability to parent (Lapierre, 2010). Often in a bid to prevent an escalation of abuse, women who are affected by men's violence in the home behave in ways that they believe will not upset their partners (Lapierre, 2010). Lapierre (2010) reports that women who are experiencing domestic abuse ensure that they are in the house when they 'should' be, clean and cook in a way that their partners prefer, and make sure the home is quiet and non-confrontational for perpetrators. These actions contribute to how children construct understandings of mothers. For example, Billie recalls how her mother would make sure that all of the children were in bed by 4.30pm, before their father arrived home:

> *She would put me and my sister in our rooms. We would be put in our*
> *room, or I would always get out. I would go to her. He would demand*
> *that I would be put away. "Those kids should be in bloody bed".*

Billie's quote highlights how this act of parenting was performed by, and thus attributed to, her mother as mothering, yet her father enforced the action. The children are "*put away*" like objects placed out of fathers' sight. Mothers perform these actions as part of a gender regime in which father's wants are achieved through the actions of mothers. Morris (2009) suggests that violent men, through pressure on mothers to parent in a particular way, or through messages provided to children about mothers as morally deficient, work at disrupting and damaging relationships between mothers and children as a deliberate tactic of domestic abuse.

Indeed, there was a clear pattern in the narratives suggesting that participants often categorised their mothers as deficient in some way. Participants expressed this through the view that their mothers were incomplete or unprepared:

> *I'm also a very big believer that you, or we, each of us, have a certain*
> *toolbox at any given point in our lives. And you might have one hammer,*
> *screwdriver, spanner, and you can only build what you can build or fix*
> *what you can fix at that point with those tools because that is what*
> *you've got. At some point, you might recognise that you need more tools,*
> *and it is up to you to go and get them, because then you can fix and*
> *build more stuff; better stuff. And so, there's no blame to be apportioned*
> *to anybody because they don't have a good set of tools, and my mother*
> *didn't have a good set of tools. (Cat)*

Domestic abuse is complex, oppressive and enduring, and the expectation that a mother experiencing such abuse could change the situation simply by having a "*good set of tools*" buys into discourses of mothers as deficient in some way, rather than as affected by and responding to the pressures exerted by domestically abusive men.

The oppressive and controlling elements of domestic abuse can affect women's physical and mental health, making it difficult for mothers to manage parenting roles within the frame permitted by abusive perpetrators (Lapierre, 2010). Yet throughout the findings from this study, the expectations that mothers would be affectionate and effective caretakers appeared to be a standard to which participants did not hold their fathers. The lack of affection or parenting by fathers was often accepted uncritically:

> *He didn't know how to be a dad I don't think. Mainly because I think mum had that role and she sort of had that role, she was the main provider and he just never had that role, and he was never really involved in our lives. (Liz)*

Here, Liz accepts that her father didn't know how to 'father', but instead of assessing him as having a deficient, as was often the case with mothers, Liz frames her father's lack of skill as an outcome of her mother displacing him from the role. According to Morris (2009), perpetrators deflect responsibility for their actions from themselves to mothers through a repertoire of coercive strategies that inform maternal alienation. Perpetrators accomplish this by creating a moral tale in which they are heralded as the victim, while at the same time degrading mothers in explicit and implicit ways on a daily basis (Morris, 2009). Consequently, a frequent outcome of maternal alienation is the transfer of responsibility for violence from the father to the mother.

Responsibility for violence and abuse appeared to be a slippery concept for participants to assign. Although they often stated that their fathers were responsible for the violence in the home, there was also an underlying assignment of culpability to mothers. Sabrina highlights such complexities in the following passage:

> *I friggen' blame her. I still blame her, and I know, logically, that little part of my brain that's over there knows that, logically, and even with the alcoholism I am still angry with him. And there is that educated knowledge that, well that's a disease and da, da, da, da, and the domestic violence, you should never blame the victim, but because she*

was so awful to us, I still have that level of, you know, "mum, you didn't get out and protect us". Like really, why keep having kids? It started when she was pregnant with [my older sister], and that's so— And I know it was a different time. Oh, I know there's rational, I can be rational, but there is also that real core part of me that for both of them— I blame him for the alcoholism, but Jesus I blame her alot for that domestic violence. She didn't protect us, and she didn't protect herself.

In this passage, Sabrina struggles with determining responsibility. She recognises her father as a victim of a disease, while her more contemporary knowledge informs her that her mother is also a victim who 'should never' be blamed. However, Sabrina cannot avoid blaming her mother because she was "*so awful*", and because she did not protect them. It is interesting that a similar standard could be applied to her father, yet Sabrina still draws on the dominant discourse of mothers as culpable for problems in families. Similar results are reported by Naughton et al., (2019) who found young people positioned mothers as responsible for the violence by remaining in the home and therefore failing to protect their children. Research shows how male perpetrators of domestic abuse further reinforce this socio-cultural discourse by blaming their partners for the violence, either all the time or for most of the incidents (Gottmann & Jacobson, 1998).

While the last excerpt shows that Sabrina is critical of her mother for failing to protect her children, Sabrina also assigns blame to her mother for occasions when she *did* engage in protective behaviours:

So what he used to do is that he'd, he'd, he'd, they'd start by fighting, he'd slap her, and she would fight back. And that is where I got angry with her. Once he slapped her it was like "just go away", but she would go, she'd get angry and go, and then it would turn into punching, then she would go on the ground, and he'd kick and throttle, and there was all sorts of stuff going on. […] She always, to me, in my view, and I know it is very unfair, but I am just being honest, she always just seemed to escalate it. Probably not true. Probably she was just standing up for herself, but as a kid my perspective was that. Yeah, there is a lot of anger towards my mother.

In Sabrina's story, the responsibility for stopping the violence is placed solely on her mother. Sabrina interprets her mother's resistance to the violence as culpability. Morris (2009) suggests that the tendency for children to view their mothers through a lens of deficiency and responsibility is indicative of the impact of maternal alienation whereby the prolonged experience of fathers using a range of tactics of abuse eventually undermines and destroys relationships between mothers and their children.

The findings of this study revealed ample evidence of damage to the child–mother relationship as a result of domestic abuse perpetrated by fathers. Like Sabrina, Indy also experienced years of anger towards her mother because of the violence perpetrated by her step-father. At the time of the interview, Indy held strong ideas that her mother was responsible for ensuring the safety of their family:

> *I went through quite a few years of, um, blaming her. Not blaming her*
> *for her being subjected to domestic violence, but I went through years*
> *of thinking, and it was after I had my own children and could feel what*
> *it was like to be a mother who would fiercely protect a child, I remember*
> *thinking, "Fuck you mum, that was up to you to protect me from that*
> *type of environment, and you didn't!" So, I held that for a long time, a*
> *lot of bitterness and anger towards her that she didn't do that. Yeah,*
> *she didn't protect me from that environment, she chose to stay in a*
> *relationship. That was how I felt, that she made these choices.*

Time and time again in the narratives, mothers were held accountable for not providing a safe environment for the family, a concept commonly referred to as 'failure to protect' (Lapierre, 2010).

Feelings that mothers were failing to protect children developed through the intersection of age, gender and kinship with domestic abuse. Children, as a result of their age, are cast as dependent on their adult parents for protection and care. The gender regime establishes mothers as responsible for the care of children, while the perpetuation of power and control of domestic abuse constrains the agency of both mothers and children. Most participants described some form of realisation that, despite being a child dependent on their parents, they were living in a volatile situation often dictated by a gendered family structure. Kelly described this realisation:

The first memory I had that wasn't happy was when the reaction that my family had when, as a 3-year-old, um, my mother was in a respite centre after giving birth to my sister, and I was pushing a doll's pram across the driveway. And I got, um, a milk delivery van backed into me, and I had a cut on my head that necessitated me going to hospital. And my mother was— yeah. So basically, my mother was hysterical; not about the fact that I was bleeding everywhere, but the fact that I had interrupted her nice peaceful stay. My father was, I remember him being very cross at my mother for not watching me, and then being very cross at me for being stupid enough to not see the van backing into me. That is my first memory. So, it was sort of like, I think, for me thinking, oh, um, I've got to be very careful what I do and how I do it.

Kelly's story provides a snapshot of the intersection of age, gender and kinship in a context of domestic abuse. Social locations of gender (assigned roles of mothers and fathers), age (adults' responsibility to care for children) and kinship (mothers as primary carers of children on behalf of fathers) intersect to show how survivors of childhood domestic abuse are relationally positioned in a hierarchical family structure (Eriksson, 2012). Here, the moral tale established and reinforced by the perpetrator is that mothers are responsible for the wellbeing of children, regardless of the circumstances. Kelly's mother, although in respite recovering from childbirth, is deemed to be responsible for the care and protection of Kelly. Established gender roles collided with kinship expectations to reinforce the positioning of mothers as both responsible and ineffective.

The findings indicate that maternal alienation had a devastating effect on the support available for both children and their mothers. Indy highlights this damage to the child/mother relationship:

I felt like I could never, I felt if I went up and hugged her then I would fall to pieces. That's how I remember it. I just couldn't, it was too painful for me to go and [pause] console her, or support her. And I put up a big boundary then of "she's not going to come near me". So, I wouldn't let mum hug me, over those years between the ages of 12 and 16. And even after I moved out of home, if she'd come in for the hug, I'd body

> *language and block her out. There was no way, I just felt like I couldn't*
>
> *let mum hug me.*

Indy is an only child, and, as the above passage indicates, severed a connection with her mother as an avenue through which support can be received by or offered to her mother. Over a protracted period, Indy was unable to show affection to her mother because of her pain at witnessing her mother's abuse. Indy resisted the violence by taking a stand against her mother and withholding her affection. However, the cost of doing so becomes apparent as Indy's story unfolds:

> *I don't know whether it was that I worried that I might fall apart, or*
> *whether I felt that it was probably a bit facile, because she had shut*
> *down my voice and I just held so much pain inside that I felt angry at*
> *her trying to give me any sort of comfort. It was like, "oh", I remember*
> *thinking at one stage, "fuck you giving me a cuddle, that doesn't make*
> *that go away".*

As well as her pain at experiencing domestic abuse, Indy is describing the anger she felt towards her mother for failing to protect her from her step-father's abuse. Her mother is held accountable for not making the violence "*go away*". Again, Indy draws on the idea that mothers are responsible for making problems in families. What is also evident is the interplay of gender, age and kinship. Indy's reliance on her mother, established through Indy's position as a child, and her kinship relationship as a daughter, intersect with the gendered notion of her mother as caretaker and protector. As such, Indy's experience of age inequality, where her actions are constrained by what she perceives as her mother's inaction, appears to be the most notable experience of oppression for her.

4.1.2 Respected but Abusive Fathers: Victims of Social Pressures

As noted earlier in the chapter, fathers were depicted in very different ways from mothers. The gendered dynamic reflected in narratives that positioned mothers as passive and ineffective characters also served to elevate fathers to a privileged status, with a moral authority that eschewed responsibility for their abusive behaviours. For example, fathers were often discussed positively in regard to their engagement in paid work:

> *I have a lot more respect for my father because he worked hard and I*
> *grew up with a very strong work ethic because he was a hard worker.*
> *He worked hard to put us through school. He worked hard to give my*
> *mother the lifestyle she liked. (Kelly)*

The gendered lens most participants used for describing parental roles tended to draw on patriarchal notions. Regardless of how often fathers engaged in paid work, participants frequently described their characters in terms of their being workers and providers for families. Walby and Allen (2004) refer to this as a 'breadwinner' discourse, whereby women are charged with family care and housework and men are understood to be the providers.

What also becomes visible in the way fathers are characterised in comparison to mothers is a divide between the provision of material and emotional resources. At times, the physical engagement in work that provides economic resources served to somewhat ameliorate the impact of abuse. Kelly provides such an example when she elaborates on her father as a worker:

> *So I had a lot of respect for my father, because he worked so hard. And*
> *that overrode the, um, um, the feelings of mistrust I had for him. In*
> *personal, personal mistrust.*

The affection that participants felt for their fathers, coupled with the tactics of power and control perpetrators used to shift the responsibility of household harmony to mothers, had a profound effect on how survivors understood their fathers' abuse. Peled (1998) suggests that children who live with domestic abuse can be caught between the contradictory sides of their fathers.

The relationships between participants and their fathers were indeed complex. Sam expresses a tension between her feelings of respect and anger when she states:

> *I did, I did, I did idolise him in that sense, it was a bit weird, like I would*
> *be sort of angry with him but looked up to him as well, because you*
> *know— oh, I don't know.*

Sam attempts to communicate her feelings of idolising her father as a person while at the same time being angered by his abuse. It was not uncommon for participants to dichotomise their fathers by externalising their violence as something separate from

their fatherly identity. Peled (1998) suggests that children either choose to see fathers as 'bad', or to find ways to reframe their abusive behaviours.

In their narratives of childhood domestic abuse, participants did tend to reframe their fathers' violence as anything other than abuse. In speaking specifically about her father's abuse, Billie explains how she reshapes her construction of him to enable her survival:

> *Things like that hurt so deep that you block them off. You cut them out. You get rid of them in your mind and focus on the good things and pretend that your dad is a hero. And you pretend everything is okay because that is what everyone else does. You pretend. You pretend. 'Cause nobody else wants to know, nobody else says stop. So— 'Cause by this time, you have to survive.*

As a strategy of survival, Billie 'cuts out' or separates off the aspects of her father's character that are too hurtful to acknowledge. In doing so, Billie is able to lionise her father and to "*pretend*" that everything is okay.

Rather than 'cutting things out', some participants divided their father's identities into two opposing subjectivities:

> *Underneath the violence, the alcoholism, all of that, he was a kind-hearted, caring, soft man. It was like Jekyll and Hyde. He would, the alcohol removed, the violence removed, he was a beautiful person. (Indy)*

Both Indy and Ellen used the metaphor of 'Jekyll and Hyde', a reference to Robert Louis Stevenson's famous work *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which one person is depicted as having two very distinct personalities: one a kind gentlemen, and one a monster. While the narratives of the participants' stories align with the novella's horror genre, many participants were able to privilege the 'kind and joyful' attributes of their father while acknowledging the existence of a monster that was something other than him. For example, some participants went to great lengths to ensure that their narratives did not totalise their fathers as 'horrible' people:

> *I am making him sound like he's really horrible. But he's really like, you know, he's just got— Then he is really lovely, and he is a big storyteller and he has a bit of Irish in him but [fades outs]. (Sam)*

This excerpt shows how participants tended to think of the abuse as something separate from the person they understood to be a father. In this case, the separation is made possible through Sam acknowledging her father's 'Irish' traits. Like the Jekyll and Hyde metaphor, Irish people are colloquially considered to be funny, joyful and passionate, but can also be quick to anger, unreasonable and difficult. Like Billie's description of 'cutting out' undesirable attributes of fathers, the process of externalising acts of abuse from the individual's desirable attributes appeared to provide participants with a way of surviving in a context of abuse.

Recognising their fathers' dualistic and polarised personality traits allowed participants to fast-forward to either the kind and loving dimension or the aggressive violent dimension in their narratives. In some accounts, participants spoke idyllically of their fathers when recalling a memory of a joyful time:

> *I loved sailing, I loved being out on the boat, so my father and I had that in common. I was the only one in the family that liked being on boats, so I felt pretty privileged to go out on the boat with him. So they were happy moments, happy moments being down the beach and swimming, and I remember as a very young child being thrown in the water by my father and— I remember a lot of laughter and a lot of happiness. (Kelly)*

Reflecting on the fun times amidst the abuse can, in part, be explained by participants wanting to remember that their families are not as terror-filled as the abuse they experienced might suggest. The joyful experience of a father taking his daughter sailing allows Kelly to normalise and de-pathologise her father's abusive behaviour, and to humanise him.

In the process of humanising fathers, participants were more likely to cast their fathers as victims rather than perpetrators of abuse. In such circumstances, abuse became symptomatic of fathers' victimology. Sam, for example, positions her father as the blameless victim:

> *I love him to bits, and I don't put any, like, blame him, like, you know, I think that what he did wasn't right, but it wasn't— it was just him cracking with the pressure of life. I am not excusing it in anyway, but I*

> *don't go "yeah, you old, you old bastard" [laughs] or anything like that.*

In a similar vein, Sarah explained:

> *I guess being poor and worrying about money and how you were going to feed so many kids and pay the bills at the same time must have taken its toll. As an adult, I can look back now and think, "Oh well, he must have been worried about all of those things all of the time". I believe that does lead to those situations. I think that all of those factors contribute [...] to domestic abuse.*

As shown in the earlier section, the breadwinner discourse (Walby & Allen, 2004) often featured to explain or mediate the use of violence and abuse by fathers. Being poor and being in an abusive environment must have been worrying for Sarah as a child. Instead of expressing her own fears and concerns, she chose to talk about the pressure poverty and stress caused her father, and uses this as a frame to understand his abuse.

In many of the participants' stories, men were portrayed as victims of external burdens, and the gendered role expectations contributed to survivors sympathetically positioning fathers as victims. Morris (2009) suggests that perpetrators of domestic abuse engage in the systematic coercion and control within households that serves to elevate themselves as victims requiring sympathy, or as heroes deserving admiration.

By embracing the idea that fathers were victims, some participants located themselves as a burden that created a source of stress for fathers. This was evident when participants explained their fathers' abuse as resulting from their inability to cope with caring for a family:

> *I look back and I think, well of course he couldn't cope, because he was pushed into this pressure cooker situation with a woman with five kids who were all in primary school. I just don't know how he did that. He obviously didn't cope with it, which is why he lashed out at mum. (Michelle)*

The message embedded in Michelle's quote is one of family as a burden that fathers have to carry. The burden for fathers is twofold: needing to financially provide for children, and needing to engage in parenting after a busy day at work when mothers

were failing to adequately attend to the task. The following quote from Sam depicting her father flying into a rage when there is an expectation that he might have to parent after a day at work highlights this second burden:

> *it was just he, in that moment, it was just about him, and he didn't want to have to deal with the crap of us kids playing up; mum should be able to deal with that and "I am sick of all this shit", you know, "I am busy working, trying to keep a roof over our heads, and I don't want to deal with this shit", and just flying into a rage.*

The work of parenting children is described as "*shit*" that should be dealt with by mothers who are not "*busy working*". This is a clear example of the gendered division of labour used to reinforce male control in the family. Morris (2000) argues that, over time, these messages are woven into everyday lives and become truths that seep, like propaganda, into the minds of both women and children living with domestically abusive men. Indeed, there seemed to be evidence of such seepage in the findings.

Even when survivors did not know much about their fathers' history, they tended to make assumptions that the abuse perpetrated was a result of some victimisation experienced by fathers during childhood:

> *as an adult, I had come to terms with the fact that he must have had a pretty rough childhood to be that person. To take it out on my mum, he must have had an awful childhood, and I still don't know anything about that childhood. I just, I hate to think what kind of childhood he had. He must of had a terrible upbringing. (Billie)*

Similarly, Ellen stated:

> *As I have got older, I feel like dad probably missed out himself a lot. Yeah, I'm inclined to think he had a fairly traumatic childhood himself, you know.*

Neither Ellen or Billy have information about their father's childhoods, yet they assume that the explanation for the violence perpetrated lies in their fathers maltreatment or adversity during childhood. Ellen and Billie are both drawn to the idea that childhood trauma is a precursor to perpetration of abuse as an adult. They draw on this understanding to make sense of why and how their fathers could be abusive. Through this framing, fathers are viewed as damaged rather than damaging. These

comments are indicative of the central tenets of the intergenerational transmission of violence theory as outlined earlier in the literature review. These understandings clearly resonate with both Ellen and Billie, who are seeking some explanation for their fathers' violence. It makes sense to these participants that if their fathers experienced violence as children, they would in turn be abusive to their own wives and children in adulthood. Again, the responsibility for the abuse and violence is shifted from fathers and attributed to a seed planted in childhood.

Participants also tended to minimise fathers' use of violence through the language they used to describe domestic abuse. Cat, for example, likens her father's action to that of a child, and in doing so negates the possibility of his actions as controlled abuse:

> *He was the youngest in a large family, and he was the spoilt child, as I understand it. And he has never, ever grown up and learnt to take responsibility for his actions, and that's pretty much it in a nutshell. So, he operates from a place of, um, "I've got the shits and I am going to have a tantrum". You know, no way of working through anything, resolving anything, being responsible for anything. You know, the shit hits the fan, pick up the dinner plate and smash it against the wall. And she'll clean up the mess. You know. Like a four-year-old having tantrums. That's my father.*

Even after the passing of many years since the abuse, Cat understands her father's violence as the actions of a spoilt child who lacked the ability to take responsibility because of poor socialisation. It may be more accurate to portray this father's behaviour as a deliberate attempt by a grown man to instil fear and intimidation in families, but Cat instead opts to minimise these aspects and instead to construct her father as a child having a tantrum. The quote also highlights the ever-present patriarchal overtones that relegate her mother to a subordinate position, responsible for cleaning up after the actions of a "*spoilt child*".

The picture that comes together from the findings in this first section is one of disrupted and unstable relationships for children with their parents. Maternal alienation interferes with the relationship between mothers and their children, while the relationship with abusive fathers appears contradictory, strained and unpredictable. These findings provide the foundations for understanding how children are relationally

engaged in families that experience domestic abuse. The next section explores the ways in which children are relationally engaged as a result of these tenuous parental relationships.

4.1.3 Relational Support Systems

The impact that domestic violence had on parent–child relationships influenced how children relationally engaged in families. For example, in situations where mothers were assessed by participants as unable to adequately fulfil the caring role, those tasks sometimes fell to the participants themselves. For example, Kelly, as the eldest daughter, perceived her role in the home as being to ensure that all housework was taken care of to enable her father to rest after his day at work:

> *So my job was to look after my mum and to please my dad. And that meant making sure that, um, the dinner was getting ready, that the house was tidy, that the focus was on him being able to blob out at the end of the day.*

Kelly's account highlights how children who experience domestic abuse often take on significant caring responsibilities in families. However, these actions are often problematised as 'parentification' in the domestic abuse literature (Callaghan et al., 2016; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Katz, 2014; Mullender et al., 2002). This type of caring is often described as children engaging prematurely in adults' roles that 'rob' children of their experiences of childhood (Callaghan et al., 2016). However, such reliance on normative constructions of what constitutes childhood also contributes to the obscuring of children's engagement in relational coping, and of ways in which they actively respond when living with domestic abuse (Callaghan et al., 2016). When reflecting on their experiences. some participants struggled to make sense of their actions within this dominant parentification:

> *it is sort of like my opportunity to be a little kid was kind of just, you know, got turned into being a helper, or a, oh, I don't know. I have thought about that sometimes, and I've thought, well, okay that's how it was, it is how it turned out. Oh yeah, I did make a difference. I did make mum's life much better. And so I probably did help keep the family*

together. So, yeah, probably not many strategies in there for other kids though. (Maggie)

In this paragraph it seems that Maggie struggles with the idea that her opportunity for childhood was somehow compromised by her requirement to be a helper. Yet, at the same time it seems important for Maggie to acknowledge how her actions 'make a difference' relationally. This importance is highlighted later in her interview when Maggie returns to the topic and adds:

I guess [helping] gave me a sense of control. A sense I was making a difference, rather than being powerless, and, you know, so, yeah, by being the good kid, the good girl, it was, I was certainly not going to make it any worse.

While Maggie draws on a feminised ethic of care (Callaghan et al., 2016) to connect gender and the helping role in her use of the phrase "*good girl*", a more salient point is her recognition of her relational engagement as a source of feeling control and power in a powerless situation. As such, rather than a passive recipient of parentification, Maggie describes her control, capability and sense of agency. This finding is congruent with similar results presented recently by Callaghan, Fellin and Alexander (2018), who found that, for some children, the position of 'carer' engenders feelings of power and capability that contribute to a positive sense of self. This is a critical consideration, given that research has shown that children who have a sense of power over their experiences of adversity have a greater chance of recovery (Wade, 1997; Yuen, 2007).

The concept of parentification is also used to describe occasions where children take on the role of caring for siblings in adversity. However, very little research has considered how survivors of childhood domestic abuse understand or make meaning of their relationships with siblings when living with domestic abuse (Callaghan et al., 2016; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). In this study, however, some participants discussed their bond with siblings as the most significant attachment in their childhoods. Georgie, for example, states:

I was an only child, with my mum and my dad. But I had two half-brothers from my mother's side, with a different father. They are 10 and 13 years older than me, so big age difference, but we were always really

close. Um, really close with my siblings. Um, never very close with either of my parents.

As in Georgie's case, in some circumstances, the bond between siblings was linked to the fact that they were the only other people outside of parents who knew about the violence that was happening in their homes. The findings from this study suggest a range of benefits for children who are able to share knowledge of the occurrence of abuse in their homes with siblings.

A leading factor contributing to children feeling isolated in abusive families is the overwhelming silence that surrounds domestic abuse (Noble-Carr et al., 2017; 2019). Several publications have highlighted how children are often reluctant or unable to discuss the abuse and violence that happens at home (Callaghan et al., 2017; Georgsson et al., 2011a; Goddard, 2009; McGee, 2000; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Mullender et al., 2002). As such, siblings sometimes become touchstones for corroborating that violence and abuse were really occurring in the home, notably when parents denied or did not discuss the abuse. Sabrina explains:

even in my late teens there were arguments going on – "things never happened, you're bullshitting" – and my sister and I, I have always had, so I've been very lucky, and I think that is what saved me, a very close relationship with my sister, and we have always been able to back each other up with our memories, but she left home at about 15, so I was only about 13, she's four years older than me, no 11, so I've got, up until 11, that back-up of memory from her. This happened. This happened. This happened.

Sabrina's comments show that she relied on her sister's shared knowledge of the abuse as a way of grounding herself in the unreality of living with domestic abuse. Thus, sibling relationships were a buffer against what Thiara and Humphreys (2015, p. 2) describe as a "conspiracy of silence", where children are unable to speak with mothers about abuse because both the child and parent believe they are protecting each other by not disclosing their knowledge or fear. The importance of having someone to corroborate experiences of domestic abuse is something that continues well into adulthood. The reluctance of family members to speak about domestic abuse has been well documented (Callaghan et al., 2016; Goddard, 2009; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

Findings from this study suggest that some siblings are able to forge a space in their relationships where they can speak about their experiences in relative safety. In doing so, they co-construct how they understand the abuse and violence that happens within their families. For Sabrina, the loss of her sister as a corroborator would also mean the loss of evidence for her own truth of her childhood:

> *But the thing is, once my sister goes, if something happens to her, or she, you know, that is almost like my— part of my memories are going too, because we have to back each other up all these years; my brother won't speak of it, as an adult. He idolises my parents, he had gone completely the other way – he won't see them as having any faults.*

Having someone to help navigate the unreality of living with domestic abuse was a recurring idea in participants' stories. It is possible that talking to siblings about domestic abuse safeguards children against the effects of 'perspecticide', the incapacity to know what you know as a result of consistent emotional abuse (Stark, 2007). It may be that corroboration of their experiences through a process of co-construction provides an anchor point when adults stay silent about the abuse, or pretend that the evidence of violence (such as broken household items or bruised bodies) does not exist.

Some of the participants spoke about not being believed about their experiences of abuse when sibling support was removed. Rachael explained what happened when her brother passed away:

> *And that left me with no one else who could acknowledge what was happening in our life at that time. Because our mother tells people that I made it all up, that none of it ever happened, and that he was a lovely man. He would never do anything like that. [My brother and I] were each other's witnesses that that did happen.*

Other participants reported similar experiences of perspecticide in situations where they lacked the benefit of being able to share their experience of abuse with their siblings:

> *I remember my sister, who was a couple of years older, we never discussed what was going on. We never said a thing. You'd just be lying on your bed because we just had single beds opposite each other, and*

the boys had bunks because there were too many people in that room. And you never discussed it. You'd— that's weird. We never did, we would just sit there, and you'd hear all the banging and clanging, and mum never screamed. We never said— didn't even say "Oh, it's over now". You didn't— you just realised that the noise had stopped. (Michelle)

Being with each other through occasions of escalated abuse meant that the children shared knowledge of the abuse taking place, but nevertheless, the children remained silent about the situation, and wordlessly drew on each other for support.

In many of the narratives, participants acknowledged the need for siblings to support each other in order to survive. Liz explained:

My sisters, we were all together. My middle sister and I were very close. Not so much my elder sister. So that, you know, mum was off doing her thing, surviving; and we were a family unit of sisters. Yeah, we were surviving, we were very close.

As Liz demonstrates, sibling relationships were sometimes critical to how children survived experiences of childhood domestic abuse. Although domestic abuse places all family relationships under strain (Noble-Carr et al., 2017), many children take it upon themselves to support each other in a reciprocal way to actively survive their experiences (McGee, 2000; Noble-Carr et al., 2017).

During periods of escalated violence, participants described the need to support and protect their siblings. Michelle explained:

I just know [my sister] would always get me to scratch her back, and I hate scratching a back. She said, "Oh Michelle, scratch me back", and then we would sing American Pie. Don McLane's American Pie, so we couldn't hear the noise. So you would be singing "Bye-bye Miss American pie", neither of us could hold a note [laughs], we were terrible. No. but that is what we did. You didn't hear the noise if we were both singing, and she' say "Scratch me back, Michelle", and so that's what I would be doing. Sitting on her, scratching her back, and we'd be singing American Pie from Don McLane. Yeah, weird.

Here, Michelle and her sister are coming together to collectively endure times when abuse had escalated to terrifying levels. Michelle presents herself as a carer and protector of her sister. In the passage, Michelle is focused on the caring that she provides to her sister to ease her distress through reassurance, distraction and physical touch. Collectively, these acts of care work to drown out the sounds of violence, and in these actions, coping is managed in a relational way (Banyard & Graham-Bermann, 1993; Callaghan et al., 2016). These are nurturing and protective acts, which, in a normative frame of childhood, would typically be the responsibility of parents. However, outside the framework of children as dependent and passive victims of parentification, the complexity of sibling relationships comes to light and shows ways in which children cope and manage by enacting care and nurturing each other.

In addition to providing care and protection for each other, participants also described working with siblings to formulate and establish strategic plans to resist abuse. Liz shared the plan she had in place with her three sisters:

One of us went [to get help], and the other two would hide, would be hidden. But whoever was the quickest went, and that was usually me, 'cause I was youngest and quickest, so I went next door.

This short passage highlights how Liz constituted her subjectivity within relational interactions with her siblings. As the "*quickest*" and the "*youngest*", Liz was assigned the role of help-seeker, while the others found places of safety in the home.

The age of each sibling seemed to play a role in determining how these responsibilities were delegated when living with domestically abusive fathers. Georgie spoke of her role in assuming responsibility for incidents as the youngest child:

I had very high expectations put on me also, but I wouldn't get in trouble quite so badly, which meant that any time anything went wrong, or something was broken, anything would happen, I would always take the blame. I would always say that it was me just to save my brothers. So, I was there, as, you know, a, a four- or a five-year-old, saying, you know, I broke the vase, or I left the light on in the bathroom, I did it all. Just to save them. Cause I knew, like, I knew that if I did it he wouldn't attack them and— I couldn't let that happen. So that was going on a lot.

These siblings used their knowledge that their father was less likely to harm a younger child to protect each other. While Georgie identifies age as the factor that lessened her likelihood of being hit, it is also possible that gender played a role here – research shows that boys are more likely to experience physical punishment from caregivers than girls (Smith et al., 2004). According to Georgie's understanding of the abuse, it was collectively safer for these siblings for the youngest child to be scolded but not harmed. This exemplifies children's awareness of how age can be used to invoke a protective response. Having younger children take the blame for minor incidents is designed to quell the father's rage and prevent a violent outburst.

Narratives show that when situations escalated in intensity, older children were often charged with more complex tasks designed to protect their siblings, which frequently manifested itself in a leadership role. In the following excerpt, Linda, as the eldest of the children, describes circumstances where she assumes responsibility for protecting her family:

> [I] was the eldest and, ah, um, I sort of took the brunt of most of it, yeah, yep. Mum couldn't do anything; she was too tired from getting beaten up all the time. And I knew my brother and sisters, my sisters just kept freaking out all the time, and my brother was too tiny. He was only a toddler.

Her mother's mental and physical harm prevented her from protecting herself or her children, and thus Linda took the most active role among the children to keep them safe from her father's violence and control. Unlike the youngest children taking the blame for minor mishaps to prevent outbursts of abuse, taking the "*brunt of it*" is a reference to absorbing the father's rage and anger during outbursts of abuse. When violence erupts from rage, the children's agreed plans for preventing the abuse are disrupted. Instead, the older child must carefully assess the situation, work with their distressed siblings, and put in place careful actions to minimise the risk of harm and injury to one another.

Some participants spoke of the need to 'rescue' their siblings during periods of extreme violence:

> [My brother] was in the high-chair, and something happened and it got violent. And [my sister] and I got out of the room, and I remember [my

sister] talking to me, so she was older, so it, I, [my brother] was in a high chair, he is probably two, I am probably four or five, [my sister] was probably about nine. And she had to go back into the room and get him out of that high chair, and I remember us talking about that, and that is the only time I remember us talking about what was going [on], so we weren't talking about what was going on, the physical violence, we were talking about rescuing him out of that high-chair. I just remember her saying, well, talking, arguing, so she was saying, "I've got to get him, I gotta get him", and I was, "No, no, no, no. He'll be fine. No, no, no, no don't go. Don't go". You see I wanted her with me in the bedroom. I didn't want her to rescue him. 'Cause she was the big sister, so she has had a lot of responsibility, whereas I didn't take that on. He was always just an annoyance to me, if he cried or if he had to be rescued. (Sabrina)

In the above quote, Sabrina's father had begun abusing his family on Christmas Day. His outburst was sudden, violent and aggressive. During such outbursts, the children were acutely aware that physical violence places all those present at risk, including younger children. These episodes instilled fear in his children so intense that they felt the need to ensure that they all emerged from safely, hence the need for the older sibling to "*rescue*" the younger. By doing so, the older sibling exposed themselves to becoming the victim of the attack rather than the protector of the younger sibling, and this knowledge is what prompts the distress of the middle child.

Knowing how to read the abuse incident and respond in ways to keep siblings safe is passed down by older children to younger siblings:

I remember being very angry with [my brother] when he cried. "Shhush, don't be silly, just shhush, don't". I think it was all just don't inflame the situations, and that, that memory just came to me then. […] and I did, I used to censure him when he cried because he was only, he was tiny [whispering], he was tiny. He was probably four or five, and I was seven or so, and there is another memory that came then, too. I think because we were— I removed myself, or we were removed, and we were taught from a very young age, I don't remember that training, "Go! You Go!", and my sister probably trained me. And as I

stood there over my brother, telling him not to cry, I trained him. Yeah.
(Sabrina)

In this passage, Sabrina presents two aspects of teaching siblings how to be safer in domestic abuse environments. Firstly, the older child has learnt what behaviours are likely to trigger an abusive reaction from her father, but the younger child has not. The older child therefore teaches the younger child how to moderate their behaviour to minimise the risk of an outburst. Secondly, the older child has learned to recognise when violence is imminent, and abuse or an attack so likely that it is no longer safe to remain in that environment. The older child therefore overtly signals to the younger child to immediately leave the room to find a safer place.

Participants had assumed many parental roles and responsibilities for nurturing sibling relationships, protecting each other, keeping each other safe, and even rescuing each other within the home environment. To cope with the broader impact of living in domestically abusive homes, however, participants also sought other forms of support that existed outside the immediate family.

Amidst the chaos and unpredictability of living with domestic abuse, participants often described other family members as a supportive and stabilising element during their childhood. Regarding staying with her grandmother, Michelle said:

You knew that you could get up and that there would be cornflakes or porridge for breakfast. You knew that there might be a savaloy for lunch, and you knew that there would be meat and veggies for tea and not the same thing the next day. And not savaloys every day; for [the] next day; for the next bloody month. It's just different, but it's just what everyone takes for granted that they will have three meals a day; and they'll feel loved; and they could watch TV; and they can have an opinion on something; and they can smell the flowers; and all those things. And you didn't have those things at home.

Michelle's memories of time with her grandmother are fond; and reflect a more stable and safer environment through routines such as the provision of food and care. The excerpt suggests that relations with grandparents allowed this child to experience what life was like free from oppression and degradation, and inclusive of care and

consideration. Michelle also reflected on her experience of a life that was free from neglect:

> *The one, the moral compass was Nan. You knew that Nan would, she would interact with you. She would ask you questions. And she would sit in there and listen to Countdown. I know she probably wasn't interested in Countdown. She was into friggin' Petula Clark and things like that, but she would sit there, and she would listen, and she wouldn't be judgemental.*

This excerpt shows how a grandmother offered this abused child the gift of positive interpersonal interaction and non-judgement. In allowing Michelle to talk and interact in an engaged and supported manner, her grandmother gave her the opportunity to recognise the "*moral compass*", to distinguish what is right (a supportive, safe and loving environment and relationships) from what is wrong (volatile, abusive, unsafe and distant relationships). Kelly describes the ease with which her great aunt was able to provide a different experience of family:

> *I loved going to her place because she made me feel. I remember distinctly sitting around the kerosene heater, 'cause she didn't have a wood heater, and having Milos or hot chocolates and homemade scones. Sitting and just talking at night, playing cards, playing dominos, and we had these little periwinkles that we had from the beach that we would collect during the day, and we would use them and wash them, dry them, and we had them as our counters. And she was an avid stamp collector, and she had this little Morris Minor little car with the little flapping indicators. I loved her a lot.*

For Kelly, the opportunity to have positive exchanges with her great aunt had a mediating effect on her experiences of oppression during childhood, and allowed her to clearly recognise what was different in her own family:

> *I'd come home from a night or a weekend in the holidays with my Aunt and be bubbly and be happy and have had a good time. You know, we didn't have to do anything. Just having somebody that actually cared how I felt, that I could stand alongside and do the dishes with, without wondering if she was gonna give a clip around the ear or whatever.*

Kelly describes her aunt's caring nature to highlight the contrast between undertaking domestic tasks as a safe and positive experience, as opposed to one fraught with risk of abuse and harm in her own family home.

Family members who believe children's accounts of domestic abuse and listen to their experiences in a safe and supportive way were highly valued by participants. Research suggests that these supportive traits from grandparents can be vital to children's safety and survival when living with domestic abuse (Humphreys et al., 2008). Indeed, the idea that extended family relationships are so critically important to children living with domestic abuse is not new (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). However, there is less empirical evidence regarding the influence of relationships outside the family. Participants believed friend and peer relationships to be a critical but different form of support:

> *See, now that is something that helped me too. Cause I, I was in the Brownies and the Girl Guides. And I met a girl, 10-year-old girl, when I was in the Brownies, and Brown Owl said to me, "Now this is Suzanna". This is a good thing along the way too, because there are a couple of people who gave me responsibilities that I didn't want -but they did. Brown Owl, she said, "Now this is Suzanna. Now you're to look after Suzanna, she is new to the Brownies." So I [big sigh], to this day Suzanna is one of my best friends still. (Linda)*

This story highlights the way allies, a lifelong friendship, helped Linda survive a childhood permeated by the terror of violence, through being given the responsibility of being a friend.

Friendships provided a welcome distraction from experiences of living with domestic abuse, and provided access to an alternative world to which children were able to escape for a while. Chris makes an important differentiation between support and distraction offered by friends:

> *Having Kip as a friend, and lots of others. You see, the street was full of baby boomers, probably 20 kids. So we were, um, I was going to say support system, but it wasn't that, we were, um, a distraction from the— So, I wouldn't call it support, it was like distraction. It was like a relief.*

The participants spoke of the way friendships enabled them to get out of the home when they were younger, and how, by playing outside or visiting other people's homes, they could further escape through imaginative play:

There was value in all those other kids in [suburb name], cause there was always someone to go for a walk with, or to get rid of some energy with. [...] So even though I wasn't a sporty sort of person, I did do a lot of walks in the bush and imaginary play. See, we did a lot of imaginary play. We had, we'd play mum and dad's records, and we'd do little performances for each other, yeah. I think it is probably, in a sense, the imagination that saves you, because it's imagination that you get from reading books and that you use in writing, and that transforms things from one situation to another. (Ellen)

4.2   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that participants' worlds are shaped by the relationships that dominate their environments. Characters slowly emerge throughout the narratives to reveal a rich and diverse range of relationships that inform and construct the experiences of childhood domestic abuse. These findings show that children are relationally and actively engaged when living with childhood domestic abuse. Social locations of age, gender and kinship influence the relationships between family members and friends. How gender and age are constructed has a substantial impact on how survivors make sense of their experiences of childhood domestic abuse through their relational interactions.

What is also clear from these findings is that survivors bring together lessons from a range of different relationships, both inside and outside the immediate family, to make sense of domestic abuse. As such, survivors are not passive recipients of adult knowledge passed down in hierarchical relationships. Instead, they are actively engaged in making sense of the actions of mothers and fathers, of domestic abuse and male control, by drawing on broader social and cultural knowledge. They are also actively accessing support and distraction from domestic abuse in relational ways. The results presented throughout this chapter set the scene for the next, which elaborates

on how survivors experience childhood domestic abuse as an ongoing and pervasive context of oppression.

Chapter 5. Experiencing Domestic Abuse as a Child

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that children experience childhood as embedded in environments of relationships, and I argued that children adopt a range of roles when surviving in a dangerous and unpredictable context. The findings show that the intersection of age, gender and kinship influence how participants experience domestic abuse. Children utilise their positions in families as a response tactic in relationships. Children also take on roles traditionally assumed to be parenting roles. A common thread throughout all these practices is a regime of power that affects all family members through the perpetration of ongoing gendered violence.

Extending themes presented in Chapter 4, this chapter highlights how children experience domestic abuse as a part of their everyday childhoods. The findings that follow are grouped around two main themes. The first theme, presented in section 5.1, *Sensory Experiences of Childhood Domestic Abuse,* examines the ways participants experience domestic abuse through their senses. These findings give an understanding of what it is like for children to live each day with the need to be closely attuned to their environments through sensory perception. The findings in this section corroborate a range of studies which have focused on how children 'witness' intimate partner violence through seeing, hearing or witnessing the aftermath of violence. In section 5.2, *Childhood Experiences of Coercive Control*, I show how children experience the everydayness of living with pervasive and ongoing subjugation and oppression when surviving in domestically violent families. The first subtheme I present here comprises section 5.2.1, *Serving Father.* This theme shows how fathers establish and maintain an elevated position of power in families. The hierarchical positioning of fathers gives rise to the second sub-theme, in section 5.2.2, *A Pervasive Atmosphere of Tension*, which presents the experience of domestic abuse as a continuous and ongoing context that calls for children to be constantly on-guard while at the same time *Being Under Surveillance* (section 5.2.3) themselves. In the final section, 5.3, I look at children's experiences of control through the sub-theme *Experiencing Entrapment: Tactics of Isolation, Deprivation and Silencing*.

5.1   SENSORY EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE

The overarching theme presented in this section is how children experience domestic abuse through their senses; seeing, hearing and feeling domestic abuse. Similar findings are reported elsewhere in contemporary qualitative studies (Buckley et al., 2007; Kitzmann et al., 2003; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). Consistent with previous findings, my study also shows that children's experiences of seeing and hearing domestic abuse, along with witnessing the aftermath and being physically harmed by abuse, are critical elements of the lived experiences of childhood domestic abuse. As such, my goal in this section is to acknowledge these experiences and to provide a more comprehensive picture of everyday childhood when living in a regime of gendered abuse and violence.

5.1.1 The Terror of Abuse Sounds and Silences

All of the participants who contributed to this study reported overhearing their fathers physically or verbally abusing their mothers. Listening was a commonly cited form of assessment in which participants identified a range of sounds and signs that fathers were escalating their abusiveness:

> *You could hear him in a temper from anywhere on the property. Like, if he was in a bad mood, he would just be throwing things, smashing things, slamming doors, stomping round, sighing, heaving. He would take off in the car really loud, and he would come back in the car really loud, and then he would break something, and he would be swearing and like, he'd— Even, on the property the size that we had, you knew. It was so clear when he was in a bad mood. (Georgie)*

This excerpt shows how participants would attune to sounds as a powerful communication device to alert them to their fathers' anger and displeasure. In listening to sounds of abuse, children learn to organise what they hear into auditory objects or streams, and group them into categories of risk to ascertain the likelihood or intensity of violence. They learn to focus their listening attention on particular noise sources.

Sounds also alerted participants that abuse had escalated to physical violence. Participants discussed hearing the sound of their mother's bodies sustaining damage during violent incidents:

My memories are of night. They're the ones that stick with me, and I remember the sound of her hitting the wall in the hallway. And this one particular house, 'cause it's quite narrow, and obviously he had hit her, and she had hit the wall, and I remember that sound of a body hitting a wall. (Sabrina)

It is clear from this excerpt that Sabrina, like many of the participants, had learnt to identify specific auditory objects (such as strikes on the skin and a body hitting the wall) without even being in the same room.

In addition to hearing the telling sounds of physical abuse, participants recalled the chilling sounds of their mothers' screams:

But for us as kids, I still remember it as quite terrifying. So I still remember, and I have a very vivid memory of "Peter, No! Peter, No!", and that can go through my head, and even saying it now I can hear her going, "Peter no. Please no. Peter No." And, um, yeah! Um, so for me that, that, that memory is the strongest memory, that voice memory, not so much of what I saw. (Sabrina)

Years after Sabrina overheard her father abusing her mother, the memory of her mother screaming stays with her more than any abuse she saw. Many of the participants listened so intently to the violence that the screams of their mothers melded into a cacophony of sounds:

He would hit her, and we could hear that, and I was only three, or well, I was very young. And lots of screaming and yelling, and smashing, and the front door getting broken down. So a lot of physical violence and emotional trauma, and financial, um, you know, abuse. Well, yeah, that was always like that. We were frightened. […] He would yell at mum, and we could hear him hit her. (Liz)

Liz's story highlights how children do not need to see violence when abuse is taking place to experience it as involvement. In these examples, both Sabrina and Liz visually reconstructed what is happening to their mother in their minds. It is for this reason that

children hearing abuse feel themselves to be actively involved and are not simply passive 'witnesses to' domestic and family violence (Callaghan et al., 2015; Hague et al., 2012).

Listening as a monitoring technique also became evident in the findings when the participants described the silences as one of the most fearful experiences. Kelly describes the progression from sounds of abuse to screams to silences:

> *There were many, many times where I remember at night being frightened of hearing the noises, hearing the screams, hearing the door. The worst sound, I think, apart from the screams, the two worst sounds I remember as a young kid, and that was hearing the door slam, the car start up, and then silence.*

When prompted to elaborate on why the silence was a prominent memory, Kelly explained:

> *The silence either meant that my mother was hurt and there was just no more noise, or it meant that no one was at home except us kids.*

For some participants, the silence was the cue to emerge from their places of safety to assist their mothers:

> *All I can remember is mum lying unconscious in the laundry, and worrying, thinking that she was dead. […] I would have been five or six at the most. And these little kids – so I also have a younger brother, so he would have been like a real toddler at the time. And you know, dad wasn't there, he had stormed off after the incident where mum— I don't know if she hit her head on the laundry tub, or was pushed or whatever it was, and, you know, like, just being so worried that, you know, she was dead there and not waking up, and not knowing what to do. (Maggie)*

The children being in another room can give parents the impression that they are protected or shielded from the violence. However, even when they are unable to see violence, children are actively involved in monitoring, assessing and responding to the

wellbeing of mothers. At the same time, there is a sense of control that keeps children in a suspended position of self-constraint until silence provides an opportunity for them to emerge, allowing them to enter the scene of the violence, accompanied by a fear of what they might find.

A further tactic of domestic abuse that constrains children's actions is the reinforcement of control through the threat of children *seeing* their mothers or siblings abused by fathers. The next section details participants' experiences of the frightening imagery of abuse.

5.1.2 The Frightening Imagery of Abuse

Being present and able to see violence or its effects was a common experience for many of the participants. McGee (2000) identified that 85 per cent of the children included in her study of childhood experiences of domestic abuse were physically present and saw their mothers assaulted. Congruently, in the present study, nearly all of the participants discussed seeing their fathers physically harm their mothers. Most participants cited multiple occasions of seeing violence, and used blanket statements to describe the frequency of seeing their fathers physically abuse their mothers:

> *I have to say I witnessed a lot of the beatings and the punches and all the bad stuff [...] Even now I can't tolerate the sight of blood. I just can't! (Sarah)*

Other participants provided specific accounts of life-threatening violence perpetrated against their mothers. Indy describes in some detail the severe abuse she watched her mother endure:

> *He smashed her in the head with a glass coke bottle. That was probably the worst one that I remember. He had smashed her in the side of the head with this bottle, put her in the bath and turned on the cold water and was slapping her face to bring her around. I remember standing at the bathroom door thinking she was dead. That was my impression; I remember thinking, "Oh my god, he has fucking killed her this time".*

The participants' fears of fathers killing mothers as a result of such extreme violence is well justified. In Australia, just under half of all homicides involve family

members. The majority of these homicides (60%) involve intimate partners, and three-quarters are perpetrated by men against female partners (Mouzos & Rushforth, 2003). Extreme physical violence, in addition to causing pain, fear, injury and sometimes death, also produces long-term psychological consequences that manifest as coercion (Stark, 2012a). Once extreme violence has occurred, the threat that it can occur again becomes entrenched and works as a technique of intimidation that limits resistance and demands compliance (Stark, 2012a).

Observations of the aftermath of violence can also convey an ongoing threat to children. Sometimes this threat is conveyed by children seeing evidence of their fathers' violence on the bodies of their mothers:

> *I mean I can't really remember the actual incidents of violence, other than the noise and the aftermath the next day, you know? 'Cause you see bruises and blood from mum and mess in the kitchen. (Michelle)*

Research shows that male violence tends to be more injurious for women, and can include broken bones, loss of consciousness, injuries to sexual organs, head injuries, lacerations and bruising, or death (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2016).

The sight of these serious outcomes of violence reinforces cumulative messages to children about the ever-present risks to the safety of their family members if they do not comply with their father's wishes. However, for Anna, the enduring nature of domestic violence manifested when she returned home to witness the damage to property in the aftermath of one of her father's violent episodes:

> *So, I don't know where I had been, I had been out at a friend's house for a night, and I came home in the morning, and the door was off its hinges, and I'm like, "Holy shit! What has gone on here?" And so he had just spat it about something, and um, I don't even know, and I still don't know. I don't think I ever found out. […] Like how does someone take a door off its hinges? But there it was; he had taken a door off its hinges, to our bedroom. Like, ripped it off, to my recollection, but like how do you do that unless you are like the incredible hulk?*

Seeing the dire effects of damage to strong structures such as doors and walls resulting from aggression and rage being unleashed is a powerful visual reminder of the havoc

fathers can inflict. For Anna, this scene evokes imagery of the Hulk, comic book character whose rage manifests as a transformation from a man into a green giant with superhuman strength and uncontrollable rage, similar to the Jekyll and Hyde metaphor discussed above.

Mothers were not the only victims who participants saw abused by their fathers. Participants described terrifying experiences of being present to see their siblings assaulted. Rachael describes seeing a particularly disturbing assault in which her nine-year-old brother was knocked unconscious by her step-father:

> *Our step-father had been hitting our mother in the lounge room. And so, I think I was washing up when [my brother] came into the lounge room and distracted him. I must have decided not to get in the way that night; I don't know why, I just kept washing up. But my brother went and interfered and then, 'cause he would say something and then run. He was quick. He was really quick. But for some reason this night he ran behind the dining table instead of running out the back door. He went behind the table and got cornered, so our step-father just reached across the dining table and kept hitting him across the head, and I don't know whether he knocked him out from a blow to the head and then he fell, or if he knocked his head when he fell, and that was what knocked him unconscious.*

This description of seeing fathers abuse siblings as well as mothers resonates with Morris's (2009, p. 414) description of domestic abuse as an "abusive household gender regime" that impacts all members of the household.

Participant accounts of fathers' abuse of their siblings highlight how child abuse is not easily separable from childhood domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; McLeod, 2018; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). Indeed, many of the participants who contributed to this study discussed their own experiences of being directly targeted by abusive fathers. The next sub-section presents findings that highlight how experiences of childhood domestic abuse intersect with child abuse.

5.1.3 The Confusion of Feeling Abuse

Acts of child abuse and neglect frequently co-occur with domestic violence (Holt et al., 2008; Jouriles, McDonald, Smith, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). Research indicates that domestic violence and child physical abuse co-occurrence rates range from 40 to 80 per cent (Holt et al., 2008). As such, children who live with domestically abusive fathers are likely to also experience child abuse and sexual assault (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). Of the participants in this study, more than three quarters indicated that they had been the victim of direct physical abuse perpetrated by fathers in connection with domestic abuse. Fourteen of the participants disclosed being kicked, punched, pushed, grabbed or thrown by their fathers:

> *Like, he's definitely hit me a few times, kicked me a few times, and punched my brother in the face a few times. (Georgie)*

Sharon reported matter-of-factly on the injuries she and her siblings had sustained as a result of her father's violence:

> *Yeah, but my father was terrible. He broke my sister's arm when we were kids. I used to go to school with bruises all over me.*

The findings from this study corroborate previous research showing that men who are violent in intimate relationships are also likely to be violent towards their children (Bancroft, 2002).

In some cases, participants had difficulty distinguishing acts of abuse from legitimate parental discipline. For example, Michelle stated during her interview that she was not a victim of direct physical abuse by her step-father, and that he had only used physical abuse against her mother. However, Michelle also recounted this story:

> *I remember him just grabbing me and just punching me in the face, and I am bouncing off the walls, and he'd punch me in the face again as I'd go to the other side of the wall.*

Rather than understanding this experience of extreme physical violence as child abuse, Michelle frames this action as a disciplinary response that occurred because she ran away from home for three days. For Michelle, the abuse she sustained was an extension of violence that she had witnessed numerous times against her mother and brothers. As such, she incorporates into a frame of normative 'control' associated with her step-father's role.

In the above excerpt, Michelle recognises that her action of running away without informing either parent of her whereabouts may have attracted disciplinary action. However, her step-father's reaction clearly falls within the definition of childhood physical abuse as "non-accidental injury resulting from actions such as punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, excessively shaking or otherwise deliberately harming a child" (Tilbury et al., 2007 p. 4). Other participants also normalised the violence because of their status as a child:

Um, and there was almost always kind of this element of us [pause] deserving it. And, um, we were always smacked as children. Always got the wooden spoon 'cause we were naughty, so this was always the teenage version of that. Like you are too, you are too old to get a smack, but you need a smack, so I kind of, I just thought it was normal, I thought it was okay. [...] So, why would I— why would I share facts about my daily life that I thought were normal? (Georgie)

Similarly to Michelle, Georgie normalises the abuse as reasonable disciplinary action for her errant behaviour. She regards corporal punishment for disciplinary purposes to be her parents' right to use because she was "*naughty*". The legitimised right of parents to physically discipline children makes it difficult for children to differentiate between abuse and legitimate parental control, particularly in a context of domestic abuse. These findings demonstrate how understanding the differences between discipline and abuse is confusing for some children because parental care is bound by normative assumptions about child rearing (Tilbury, Osmond, Wilson, & Clark, 2007).

Not all of the participants accepted all physical punishment as discipline. Some were able to identify the difference between discipline and abuse. Here, for example, Cat differentiates between her mother's use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tactic and her father's use of violence to inflict harm:

I remember thinking it was kind of funny watching this whole thing play out with this angry mum running around with the wooden spoon in her hand. But if she caught him, he copped a walloping. But somehow the ingredient that was missing, for me, that made that not as scary and disturbing to me was that it wasn't premeditated. Not, "I am really going to hurt you and that is your punishment".

Cat recognises that some child behaviour does warrant discipline, but is clear that there is a boundary between the punishment her mother used and the premeditated and sadistic abuse her father inflicted. Cat elaborates:

> *Yeah, and that I think as, as a child, the awareness of that, like that's a frightening thing, you know, trying to, in your, your little innocent mind, trying to make sense of that. This is your dad, isn't he supposed to love you? And yes, you did something naughty, and there should be, um, a consequence for it, but this?*

Research has indicated that children consider being physically struck by a parent to be a normal and inevitable experience of childhood (Saunders, 2003). Such expectations may explain why families who experience domestic abuse demonstrate a greater tolerance for violence (Zelimar, Bidarra, Lessard, & Dumont, 2016). Using corporal punishment for disciplinary purposes is a hotly debated matter (Child Family and Community Australia, 2017). UNICEF (2014) states that, globally, six in 10 children aged two to 14 years old experience corporal punishment from their caregiver. Such actions occur despite current evidence that, when compared to other methods of discipline, there are no clear positive outcomes for the use of corporal punishment (Ferguson, 2013). Some research suggests that children are just as "likely to defy their parents when they spank as to comply with them" (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016, p. 13).

The overlap between direct child abuse and domestic violence makes it difficult to differentiate between the two, because the abuse of perpetrators is often directed at both mothers and children (Dallos & Vetere, 2011). However, for other forms of violence, the participants were explicit about acknowledging it as abuse, and about knowing that there are different levels of trauma associated with various tactics of abuse. Rachael recalls being 10 years old when her step-father moved in with her family and began perpetrating domestic abuse, which included sexually abusing her:

> *It sounds stupid to say, but that was only hitting. The sexual abuse was the stuff that was really hard to deal with. The physical violence, as opposed to the sexual violence, that was nothing compared to— I don't know—[…] Like, for some people being hit would be the worst thing that had ever happened to them, but if you got all those different things*

going on, that's not necessarily at the top. That's not the worst thing
that can happen.

In this quote, Rachael highlights how children's experiences of domestic abuse can be diverse. For her, Rachael's experiences of childhood sexual abuse outrank her experiences of physical violence. Childhood sexual abuse is not uncommon in domestically abusive families (Radford, Allnock, & Hynes, 2015). Over one third of study participants disclosed experiences of child sexual abuse. Of the seven participants who made unprompted disclosures of sexual violence, four experienced sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers or step-fathers, one detailed an occasion of sexual exploitation by her father, while family acquaintances sexually abused two of the participants. Many studies have shown a link to exist between child sexual assault and domestic abuse, some suggesting that exposure to perpetrators of domestic abuse is one of the strongest risk factors for incest (Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Hester, Pearson, & Harwin, 2000; Heward-Belle, 2013; Kellogg & Menard, 2003). Although there are no precise figures, the rate in which sexual abuse and experiences of childhood domestic abuse co-occur have been estimated at 40 percent (Bedi & Goddard 2007; Richards, 2011). Despite this risk, few studies have examined the co-occurrence between domestic abuse and childhood sexual assault (Goddard & Bedi, 2010; Zelimar et al., 2016).

Some participants indicated that the powerful positions fathers held in families made it difficult to distinguish their sexual abuse from fulfilment of their roles as dutiful children:

I think, particularly with the sexual stuff, I thought maybe it is totally
normal for him to do that. Maybe I am just feeling horrible because I
am not being the dutiful daughter. (Kelly)

The "*dutiful daughter*" is a phrase representative of the intersection of gender, age and kinship in a context of childhood domestic abuse. The intersection of these social locations highlights the relationships present in the familiar context that foster male domination over female, fathers' domination over children, and the domination of adults over non-adults. When these relationships are present in situations of domestic abuse and childhood sexual abuse, the violation of children's safety is significant (Zelimar et al., 2016).

The blurring of normality that participants ascribe to different forms of abuse relates to a deeper and more nuanced experience of childhood domestic abuse situated as experiences of power and control. The next section explores survivors experiences of coercive control.

5.2   CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF COERCIVE CONTROL

In this section, I use data to show how the participants experienced fathers as elevated to the position of overarching controller. I show how the attainment of such positions of authority is made possible through the perpetration of tactics of coercive control (Stark, 2009, 2012). Stark (2012) theorises that the technology of coercive control is subdivisible into tactics of coercion, which consists of actions that seek to hurt and intimidate victims, and control, being behaviours designed to isolate and regulate other family members.

By presenting findings that show participants' experience of coercion, I use the first sub-section, *Serving Father*, to build on the last chapter, which showed fathers' use of their position as men to assume authority over women and children in domestically abusive families. The section shows that, in addition to gendered power divisions, children are subjugated in families on the basis of their status as young and non-adult. The hierarchical positioning of fathers gave rise to the second sub-theme, '*a pervasive atmosphere of tension'*. This sub-section presents findings that show how children have a continuous awareness of their surroundings, but at the same time that they live with experiences of *'being continually under surveillance'*, which is the third sub-theme. The fourth sub-theme, '*my degradation'*, presents the way the use of threats, surveillance and degradation by fathers causes participants to pre-empt and mitigate escalations of abuse by conforming to their fathers' control, which is more fully examined in the final sub-theme, *'being controlled'*.

5.2.1 Serving Fathers

This section examines how participants' narratives show their fathers as assuming a position of omnipresent authority and control where their needs and wants dictate the routines of family life. This is a situation in which all family members are

expected to privilege the father's requirements above all others in the family because of his position as male, adult and father.

All of the study participants spoke about how their fathers used violence, anger and volatility to ensure their position of authority and privilege in the family. Anna said:

> *You know, so I remember him hurting mum. I remember him hurting me*
> *with the spade. I remember just him, his general anger and volatility,*
> *and things had to be his way.*

This excerpt clearly shows the operation of coercive control in securing male privilege in families. Coercive control in heterosexual relationships is always constructed according to established and entrenched gender stereotypes (Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2012b). Coercive control is embedded in the everyday flow of life and reflects taken-for-granted gender roles (Laing & Humphreys, 2013). As explored in the previous chapter, the core tactics in coercive control build on practices that are governed by gender norms in relationships, such as men as the breadwinners and women as responsible for the care of the home and children. These established, gendered roles make male domination harder to positively identify when men extend these stereotypes as a part of a gendered regime in families (Morris, 2009; Stark, 2007). Participants identified tasks such as having food ready or being home to attend fathers as important roles for other family members. Sarah highlights this when she states:

> *Mum always fed dad. That was the most important thing in the house,*
> *was to make sure that he had something to eat; even if that was just a*
> *sandwich, a piece of bread and milk. Dad expected mum to be there to*
> *get that for him, and if she wasn't— well, that was the cause of a lot of*
> *the violence as well. It was that controlling factor that she should have*
> *been home and why wasn't she? You know, it didn't matter that she was*
> *out trying to get food. None of those excuses were any good. So, yes, it*
> *was routine and control.*

Sarah's father used the tactic of intimidation through engendering fear of what he might do if family members were to fail to comply with his wishes. Tactics of intimidation rely heavily on patterns of behaviour previously established by perpetrators (Stark, 2007). Past experiences inform an understanding of what fathers

might do or be capable of doing if their demands are not met (Stark, 2007). Sarah describes what would happen on occasions that her mother was not present to serve her father:

> *That's when dad would start throwing everything out the back door and smashing it all on the concrete. The chairs, plates, cups, everything he could get his hands on. Needless to say, we didn't have chairs for very long in our life. We sat on the floor to have meals when there was food available, which wasn't very often.*

By using intimidation, Sarah's father had established a rule that everyone knew: he is served food, and his wife will serve his meal; if not, violence may ensue. As Sarah's comments indicate, any failure to "*be there*" to provide a meal had previously resulted in "*a lot of the violence*". As such, the threat of violence, whether it is carried out or not, ensures that Sarah's father will have a meal served by his wife regardless of the needs or wants of any other member of the family.

Sarah's narrative further develops how fathers position themselves in families above the needs of all others. Sarah's family experienced extreme poverty, and she recounts that sometimes she and her siblings might go without food for days at a time. However, the rules that governed her father's right to be waited on at meal times remained sacrosanct:

> *We got an oyster on a bit of rice, and that sounds all a bit extravagant, but one oyster on a little bit of rice had to sustain us for two or three days. Think about that. So dad always had his little bit of meat and some bread, and we would sit there at the table, and when we used to sit there and watch him we would think, "Oh that's steak, I wish we could have some", and when he was finished and left the room […] we would all race over. He'd go outside, and we would all fight over his plate to lick it off. We did. That's how it was. (Sarah)*

Sarah's depiction of mealtimes highlights how dominance, subjugation, fear and control are bound up in the operation of coercive control. Through a series of discrete acts, Sarah's father wove a pattern of dominance that constrained the actions of all other members of the family, made them subordinate to his own needs and desires, and simultaneously elevated himself to a position of entitlement. Sarah's mother was

charged with the responsibilities of meal provider and server, while the children were relegated to the position of not even being worthy of the same food.

The sense of entitlement that underpins the subordination of women and children in domestically abusive families extends to the idea that fathers are more entitled than other family members to resources, as well as to rest or relaxation. Anna describes how her father's rituals and routines centred on his access to leisure activities:

Dad's routines and dad's rituals, they were the law of the land. Wednesday night was squash night. He would come home from work, he would rest, and then he would go off and play squash. And I look back, and I think: your wife was working night-shift, taking the kids to school, snatching some sleep, picking the kids up from school, doing all the housework, and then going back and doing it all again.

The examples provided by Sarah and Anna are two of many that indicate participants' experiences of the insidious insertion of fathers as elevated members of families who hold power to make decisions about the actions of all other family members. Stark (2007) suggests that one of the most insidious forms of misogyny is the methodological disregard for the victim's personal needs or interests. Anna and Sarah experienced the fundamental disregard of their personal needs and the needs of other family members by their fathers.

When abusive fathers did consider the needs of others, their actions continued to intermesh with a sense of entitlement and ownership. Some of the participants reported that their fathers sometimes viewed family members as personal possessions:

My dad [pause] loved, loved his wife, but she was a bit of a possession to him. A bit of a status symbol. […] And I think, with my father, it was a case of keep[ing] my mother happy, and then she will meet his needs, sexually and emotionally and every other way. Um, let her be unhappy, and he doesn't get what he wants or needs. […] So, looking after my mother was not an act of love. Um, yeah, it was an expectation. (Kelly)

Again, the needs and expectations of the father rest at the heart of the above excerpt. Kelly highlights the difference between her father's love of her mother as an object to be possessed by him and the love of her as a person in her own right. Having his own needs met precedes any provision of care.

The consistent positioning of fathers as the central focus of families gave way to participants being permanently on guard to monitor their environments. The next section explores how 'being on guard' becomes an everyday aspect of participants' experiences of living in an atmosphere of pervasive tension.

5.2.2 A Pervasive Atmosphere of Tension

The pressure exerted by fathers had a significant effect on the lives of participants during their childhoods. The underlying threat of what might happen if things did not go according to the wishes of fathers created a coercive context that disrupted any real sense of safety:

> *Um, and so part of the issues that I grew up with was around a terrible*
> *sense of insecurity. Not safety. Not ever feeling safe. (Cat)*

This finding is congruent with the stories of children who report being in a constant state of fear when living with perpetrators, a fear that does not always dissipate, even after the child no longer lives with the perpetrator (Buckley et al., 2007; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015; Överlien, 2013).

Moving away from the traditional conceptualisation of childhood domestic abuse as occasions of witnessing violence, and instead recognising the wider impacts of ongoing coercive and controlling behaviour provides insight into how children experience the impact of domestic abuse daily (McLeod, 2018). For example, some of the participants spoke of living each day in an environment where constant tension would give rise to a frequent sense of approaching panic. Chris likened his experience to living in a horror movie:

> *You've got that tension there, your living in the Bates Motel, Psycho,*
> *with Norman and everything, only it's not Norman, it's 'the old man'.*

Some models of domestic abuse describe a period of mounting tension that occurs within a circular process of successive phases. For example, Leonore Walker's (2006) cycle of violence theory proposes that three distinct phases follow courtship in intimate relationships. The first phase is the tension-building phase, which is characterised by a perception of mounting danger which is sensed by victims. An acute battering incident follows the tension-building phase, which consists of an escalation

of abuse that results in an eruption of violence. The final stage is the loving-contrition phase, where the abuser apologises and there is a temporary cessation of violence. However, Chris, as the above quote indicates, was one of many participants experiencing chronic tension rather than episodic periods of tenseness in the home. These findings suggest that some children experience domestic abuse as ongoing and pervasive.

Unlike the tension-building phase that Walker (2006) describes as an adult's experience of a cycle of domestic abuse, the participants in the present study described tension as a constant that imbued their daily childhoods and followed them into various social spaces. Cat highlights this pervasiveness of tension:

It is always there; even when you take time out. […] It is in the back of your mind […] Always having it there. I think that this is a little bit what this is like; that overshadowing. Like the cloud across the sun. So the sun might be shining while you are all sitting there doing your homework, but in the back of your mind […] there is that anticipation thing. I remember, it is almost like a whole other dimension of things, like punishment, part of the worse thing about it is the anticipation that it's coming.

Cat's account captures how the tension that stems from anticipating abuse never leaves her, it is experienced as something that is always on the horizon and coming nearer. An overlay of uncertainty and risk to safety taints every aspect of her daily activities. Stark (2007) argues that the claim that all domestically abusive relationships have distinct periods of build-up is only partially accurate. Perpetrators can move from calm to rage without warning, while others constantly "seethe with rage" beneath a calm exterior (Stark, 2007, p. 246).

Stark's (2007) idea of the insidious rage of perpetrators was evident in many of the participants' stories about the haunting threat of what might happen at any time. Participants reported constantly feeling on edge as they considered things that could aggravate their fathers:

So it's not just the physical stuff, you know? It is the 'What ifs?', and it's the, 'He might's' and 'Is this right?' 'Is that a problem?' When you

> *talk about living in fear and the controlling factors, and just, it's just*
> *the constant being on edge. (Anna)*

In such circumstances, the ongoing atmosphere of tension reinforces the need for victims to remain constantly vigilant (Stark, 2007). Even in situations where participants were physically out of their fathers' reach, pervasive threats of violence readily came to mind:

> *Sometimes we would be at boarding school and we were safe. In the*
> *holiday period, that is when we were vulnerable. And we knew he would*
> *come around at birthday times for my sister. So I knew he would be*
> *around then, and so you were fearful. You just be thinking, well he's*
> *going to be around soon. And Christmas, he was going to be around*
> *soon, so you would have to be on your guard. (Liz)*

For Liz, the safety of a boarding school provided refuge, but upcoming special events and holiday periods brought fear into her places of safety. The ability to predict and pre-empt possible escalations of violence was an important aspect of surviving in an ongoing context of abuse. However, the violence fathers perpetrated did not always follow a rationale, and was not always predictable.

The unpredictability of fathers' violence and abuse was a cruel twist that further shattered participants' sense of safety. Research has shown that perpetrators do not always abuse in systematic or predictable ways (Stark, 2007). Sometimes acts of violence erupt out of the blue:

> *So, there would be joking, good humour, and, um, you know? You would*
> *be kind of [takes a deep breath] really buoyed by that; 'Hey, we are*
> *having a nice time' and then— something would turn, and, you know?*
> *And that would be that. You would just realise that he was angry, and*
> *he would lash out, either verbally or physically, or both. You know, he*
> *would throw things at you. (Anna)*

These unpredictable and sudden violent outbursts were often unprovoked and devoid of any detectable trigger. The reality that violence could erupt at any time meant that participants were unable to let their guard down:

I would be woken up, often, sometimes by something breaking, or a door

slamming, or sometimes by a scream. Sometimes by loud voices, and I

got to the point where I was afraid to go to sleep. (Kelly)

Billie also discussed how her certainty of impending doom prevented her from sleeping:

Well, you already know that a violent situation is nearly 99 per cent

going to happen. Every day, 'cause that is how it is every day. That is

just life, every day, 24/7. So I suffered from insomnia. They called it

insomnia. I call it 'You just don't have time to sleep', because you know

impending doom is more than likely going to happen.

It is clear from the above findings that living in a context of coercive control does not provide a predictable environment, and that this removes children's ability to be vulnerable, even vulnerable enough to relax into sleep. While there are implications for children with disrupted sleep patterns that result from domestic abuse (Humphreys, Lowe, & Williams, 2009), the participants in this study associate their inability to let their guard down with a fear of being caught off-guard and unprepared. These experiences highlight how children live in an environment lacking security. McLeod (2018) notes that security is one of the basic needs of children. Security consists of a continuation of care in a predictable environment provided by a stable family unit (McLeod, 2018). Understanding childhood domestic abuse through a lens of coercive control highlights how the unpredictability of living with domestic abuse ensures that children are unable to let their guards down, even when they need sleep.

Situations in which unexpected or unpredicted violence occurred had a profound impact on participants' sense of control:

You would hear all the yelling and the hitting, you know. So, there was

that element of it that made it a bit worse, too, sometimes, 'cause you

had no idea how it started, you had no idea what it was about, you had

no control. (Sabrina)

Participants believe there to be a relationship between their understanding of abuse and their sense of control. Understanding what had led up to or caused the outburst was important because it allowed survivors to integrate that knowledge into processes of preventing, protecting and navigating the abusive outbursts. In other words, it gave

the participants a locus of control. Without an understanding of the factors that precede the violence, participants were not able to pre-empt escalations because they were missing vital answers to the questions of "*What if?*", "*He mights*" and "*Is this right?*".

Research demonstrates that living in a constant state of tension can lead to a vicious cycle where developing hypervigilance for threat increases experiences of anxiety, which, in turn, increases hypervigilance (Dalgleish, Moradi, Taghavi, Neshat-Doost, & Yule, 2001). Existing constantly on guard highlights how children experience domestic abuse as more than a sensory experience. Kelly provides insight into the complexity of how young people use their senses to monitor situations:

> *You learn as a kid; I learnt as a kid to be able to read the non-verbal,*
> *the body language, you would know how he walked, you know, um, how*
> *he would sigh, you'd know what mood he was in just by— without him*
> *saying a word.*

Kelly's words show that children experience this persistent tension, apprehension and fear viscerally. Thus, corporeality was evident in participants' narratives. This experience cannot be underestimated, as some of the participants identified it as the most significant aspect of their domestic abuse. For example, Ellen, who was sexually abused by her father, highlights the devastating impact of living with the everyday tension and fear inherent in childhood domestic abuse:

> *What was worse for me was the 'walking on eggshells'. The being*
> *scared of his temper was actually worse than the being molested. Both*
> *were awful, but that— [fades off].*

Ellen uses the phrase 'walking on eggshells' to describe the impact of tension and ongoing threat posed by her father's violence. This phrase is used so often by children describing their experiences of coercive control that the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in the United Kingdom have incorporated the frequency of its use into their definition of coercive control (McLeod, 2018).

While participants went to some lengths to communicate their experiences as watchful monitors in the home who were constantly on guard, they also discussed the effect of being the objects of surveillance themselves. This engendered a sense of

constant alertness in the home, where children observed and assessed the actions of parents, while at the same time instilling a feeling of being constantly monitored themselves. The next section discusses how participants experienced surveillance as a tactic of coercion.

5.2.3 Being Under Surveillance

Many of the participants spoke about the different ways they were surveilled by their fathers as a control tactic. Perpetrators of coercive control use surveillance as a way of presenting themselves as omnipotent and omnipresent (Stark, 2007). The idea that fathers were everywhere and could know anything worked to ensure that their tactics of control crossed all social spaces and continued regardless of whether fathers were present or not:

> *I was at [school], and if he drove past the school, I would have a panic attack. So I was looking, I remember one day I was looking out the window, and I had a such a bad panic attack that kids started spreading rumours that I was on drugs because I was just hysterical, um, and that was my reaction to just seeing his car drive past. (Georgie)*

Georgie's reaction to the possibility that her father might observe her at a time when she was not constraining her behaviour in ways that her father would deem acceptable has a profound effect on her. This finding highlights the power that surveillance holds as a tactic to imprison people in their own lives through the fear of what might happen if they are discovered transgressing abusers' expectations (Candela, 2016; Stark, 2007).

Research shows that perpetrators purposely engage in activities to let their victims know that they can be overheard or watched at any time (Stark, 2007). Chris recalls several experiences where his father revealed his tactic of hiding in the house. Chris reports how his father would lie in wait to catch him transgressing rules. On one occasion, Chris was portraying his father (Bill) negatively in a story to his younger brother, Rus:

> *Bill had been hiding again outside the door. And the stairs leading up to the attic were rickety, quite steep and rickety, quite creaky, and, um, he had got out of bed and made his way up there, [...] it was dark, the*

lights were out, it was late at night anyway, and he is hiding outside the door. And suddenly, I didn't get that sentence finished, and the doors flew open, and as he opened it, he hit it and bang, with the palm of his hand, and Rus, Rus screamed. He had obviously been there because he made a comment about this water [a reference to the story Chris had been telling]. So, he had been listening to us.

The description of the rickety, creaky stairs and Chris's lack of awareness that his father was outside his bedroom door suggests that his father had navigated the stairs quietly so as to listen to his sons without detection. Later, Chris added to his story:

Yeah, yeah. It's the watchfulness. You're just scared, what you are scared about is: is it ending up having your hide tanned in all this business, you know?

For Chris, the surveillance brought a real risk that he would be physically assaulted as a result of transgressing some rule. The possibility that his father could be hiding and watching perpetuated a constant fear of the potential for violence at any moment.

Rather than lying in wait, Billie detailed how her father would lay traps for the family in times when he was absent from the house to monitor if anyone had visited or left in his absence:

I know that one time when he went away, it must have been when he was staying with that girlfriend of his, and he had set up these traps, so there were these cotton lines set up around the house.

Here, breakages of the cotton worked as an indicator that someone had left the house. Awareness of the cotton string lines and their purpose was a powerful, fear-producing tactic used to terrify family members into compliance. Billie explained the impact of this surveillance as "*Just petrifying mum. Just more terrifying her. Just terrifying her*". Thus, surveillance alone was not an effective strategy of coercion, but instead made threatening by the possibility that the consequence of being discovered transgressing rules would be abuse.

Another tactic of surveillance that was particularly damaging to the mother–child relationship included fathers eliciting information about children from mothers. In the following example, Georgie's father forces her mother to account for each moment of her own day before having her provide a surveillance report on Georgie:

I would hear the way that dad would take mum through every step of her day, and then, and then it would get to 3 o'clock when she picked me up from school, and she would tell him what she did with me and what I was doing. Um, so the first part of the— the first was mum would be talking, and then dad would criticise, you know. […] When she would get to the part about me, it would be all about why aren't, why aren't I doing more reading, because, you know, my reading is not good enough, or why am I not doing more maths, because my maths isn't good enough, why have I been allowed to get an ice cream at Wendy's when I am overweight. […] It was just insult after insult. […] it was just really always negative, always not doing enough of the right thing and um— [fades to silence].

In the above story, Georgie's father used techniques of micro-surveillance (Stark, 2007) to monitor every aspect of her mother's daily use of time and her physical movements. Micro-surveillance is a tactic that is used by perpetrators to detect any sign of disobedience or disloyalty (Stark, 2007).

The auditing by Georgie's father of her and her mother's daily activities worked to destabilise the possibility of safety in the pockets of time in which her father was not present. As such, the regulation imposed by fathers is dispersed across sites that might ordinarily offer a sense of safety and autonomy, such as time alone with mothers or days spent at school. These are places that can offer a break from the oppressive force of dominant fathers, places that Stark (2007, p. 208) refers to as "safety zones". However, surveillance tactics permit perpetrators to reach across and into these zones of safety, and to quash any vestiges of autonomy or freedom they might otherwise afford (Stark, 2007).

My study shows that perpetrators use fear of their power to pry into the private lives of family members as a tactic to enforce control. Indeed, in Georgie's case, many of the everyday activities that her mother recounted to her father elicited critical comments that were hurtful and degrading for Georgie to hear from a parent. This use of degradation is another commonly reported tactic of coercive control. As such, the next section presents accounts that show the various ways fathers used degradation to enforce control.

5.2.4 My Degradation

This section presents the powerful effects degradation had on participants in ensuring they comply with their fathers' wishes. The participants insightfully realised how, through the use of degradation, fathers projected feelings of inadequacy onto their children:

> *Yep, and I can't remember much, much else except the beatings, when he use to get in those rages and he'd stalk like a lion, and we would have to sit at the table and watch him just pace up and down and up and down, and listen to him carry on about how we stopped him from getting on in life. Getting on in life! It was our fault. We were the reason he was— he had all his problems. (Linda)*

The tyrannical ranting described in this passage exemplifies the emotional abuse that family members who live with domestic abuse endure. Using extreme criticism, Linda's father engaged in degradation as a way of establishing his moral superiority over the family. Emotional abuse through degradation is a powerful tactic of abuse, because it often consists of insults and put-downs that revolve around areas of identity where victims' self-esteem may already be vulnerable (Stark, 2007). This is visible in Linda's quote where her father draws on a discourse of dependents as burdens on the provider who prevent him from attaining success. Linda's father, through the use of degradation, shifts the responsibility for his perceived failure to succeed onto Linda, her siblings and her mother. Degrading and denying self-respect by combining emotional control and verbal abuse is particularly harmful to individuals in positions of primary dependence, such as children (Stark, 2007).

Participants recounted experiences of degradation where, instead of being tied to gender, degrading and insulting comments were linked to areas of identity often assigned as important to children. For example, the verbally abusive tirades fathers imposed on participants gave rise to a sense of being perpetually inadequate:

> *He was always putting us down. […] We were never good enough, that was the big feeling. And even at school, um, he didn't like, it wasn't whether I was good at a subject or anything, I didn't play sport. I wasn't a sporty person, and I wasn't in the choir. Why wasn't I in the various groups that the school had? You know? I don't know why he was like*

that. Very critical. Like he wanted to live his life through us, maybe,

and we weren't measuring up. (Ellen)

Again, degradation, as a form of emotional abuse, was used in a targeted way to convey to Ellen and her siblings that they were a cause of her father's shame for not being good enough. Emotional abuse of children has been described as a murder of the soul, in which recurrent parental attacks, rejection, devaluation and contempt harm and undermine the child's emotional wellbeing (Finzi-Dottan & Karu, 2006). It is through the erosion of self-worth that degradation becomes weaponised as coercive control (Stark, 2007). Recipients of this type of emotional abuse often do not recognise their experiences as abuse because they are slowly taught to believe they are the ones at fault for problems in families (Sims, 2008).

While participants report occasions of direct degradation, they were also witnesses to the systematic emotional abuse of other family members. Participants discussed how their fathers sexually degraded their mothers as a shaming tactic:

I heard all of those conversations. All the accusations and the, you

know, the— I heard statements from [him] like, "You just don't like dick

do you?". Like, ah, how old was I? Ten or something, hearing this kind

of stuff. So everything I learned about sexuality was negative, negative,

negative. It's a horrible thing, it's an unpleasant thing, it causes conflict

between people, it's not enjoyable, it's, it's, it's dark. So, that was a

whole other dimension to what I had to deal with in my life. (Cat)

In this passage, Cat conveys how degradation can target areas of sexual identity. Cat's father uses humiliation as a tactic to coerce Cat's mother to comply with his wants. The upshot of his actions was Cat putting together her understanding of sexual identity through a fog of shaming perpetrated by her father, meaning that Cat learned from an early age that female sexuality is a negative and unpleasant thing. A further underlying message is that women who do not make themselves sexually available to male partners are deviant or deficient in some way.

Similar messages were conveyed to other female family members. For example, Sabrina discussed the sexual degradation of her older sister by her father:

Dad had a particular obsession with [my sister's] sexuality. It was

really weird, she was his eldest and [...] so he was, she was about 12,

> *and he started getting obsessed with her virginity. I suppose, and he*
> *used to get drunk at lunch time— and he rings her on school holidays,*
> *we would be at home, and [he'd] ring her, and call her a slut, and*
> *accuse her of sleeping with people and stuff, and it just got out of hand.*

These overt tactics illustrate the long-lasting impact of degradation on the children of domestically abusive men. Stark (2007, 2012b) identifies degradation as one of the most often used forms of emotional abuse against women. However, this section shows that children experience degradation in direct ways, as well as through the degradation of their mothers. What remains with people who experience ongoing degradation is the total rejection that comes from those who should accept us and support us in spite of our mistakes and shortcomings (Sims, 2008).

So far in this section, the participants' accounts show how children experience abuse as actions that aim to hurt and intimidate mothers and children. These tactics are largely psychological, and reinforce the perception that fathers occupy a position of entitlement in families. These tactics are experienced by children as a pervasive and ongoing context of abuse in which they are constantly on guard, surveilled, and degraded. However, in addition to tactics of coercion, participants also discussed ways in which they were subjected to tactics of control. The next section highlights how, through the operation of coercion, fathers were able to constrain the lives of children through control.

5.3 EXPERIENCING ENTRAPMENT: TACTICS OF ISOLATION, DEPRIVATION AND SILENCING

The participants in this study revealed that perpetrators use tactics of control to isolate and regulate the actions of both mothers and children. These tactics of abuse served to create a hostage-like environment for the participants when they were young. The title of this thesis is drawn from a story narrated by Kelly, who here expresses her feeling of entrapment and her longing for freedom:

> *I remember one particular time as clearly as if it happened yesterday.*
> *There was a brick wall and there was the ocean, and I remember my*
> *sister was just collecting shells, but my brother and I were sitting on*

this brick wall looking at the ocean and hearing the yelling and the performing in the caravan behind us. And I remember thinking to myself, and I might have even said it to my brother, "Don't you wish you were a dolphin and we could just swim away?" And that freedom of just looking out to the ocean and thinking I wish I was out there, miles and miles and miles out there. Just getting away, because the confined space, you couldn't get away from it, you know.

In Kelly's story a brick wall separates her and her brother from the ocean that represents freedom, and keeps her within the inescapable space of her experience of childhood domestic abuse. As Kelly's story indicates, this study has found that fathers, through their assignment to the category of adult men, were able to entrap and isolate the participants as dependents. Their tactics inhibited the liberty of children, and simultaneously worked to silence them. The next section examines how childhood domestic abuse is experienced as a site of entrapment, isolation, depravation and silencing.

5.3.1 Experiencing Entrapment

As in the previous chapter, the status of children as dependent on adults surfaced as a prominent issue affecting how children experience domestic abuse. The participants often expressed a sense of helplessness due to their status as children:

[…] yeah, one time he had her. I think it was the iron, iron cord, or something, no it was the kettle cord. The kettle cord, of course it would be. It was around her neck. Um. I was older then, I was actually a teenager when that happened. Um, the time when I stayed in the bedroom would have been the times before I was a teenager. […] You know, um, once I was older I, I would have been out there but, yes, there wasn't, it's this powerless thing again, you know, what can you do? You are not in control [laughs nervously]. Yeah, so. (Ellen)

For Ellen, age made a difference in how she could intervene. As a young child, she stayed in her bedroom, but as a teenager, she could be "*out there*" in closer proximity to her abuser. Billie also understands childhood as a "*space of time*" in which things are different:

> *But it, it's normal. Like, so in that space of time, everyone is like that. The whole world is like that, 'cause this is your world. As a child, this is your world, and this is normal.*

In the above quotes, the participants link feelings of powerlessness and oppression directly to the status of being a child. These accounts give a sense of children being trapped as a consequence of their dependency on parental caretaking.

As participants narrated their experiences of living with domestic abuse, other aspects of their stories also paralleled experiences of involuntary incarceration. For example, many of the participants discussed their experiences of being micromanaged by their fathers:

> *It was absolutely controlled, and we weren't allowed to leave the yard. And mum couldn't go anywhere or do anything without his permission. Even when she was allowed to vote, dad went with her and told her who she was to vote for. That's just the way it was. He gave her orders, and if she didn't obey them [pause] heaven help us all. And it was the same with us; dad used to beat the kids up all the time. There was rarely a good reason for beating up any of the kids. We were pretty much regimented, and you weren't game to do anything wrong. (Sarah)*

Sarah uses the phrases "*absolutely controlled*", "*he gave orders*", and "*we were pretty much regimented*" to convey a picture of entrapment. Her description of childhood could easily be that of someone held hostage, or incarcerated in a prison. For instance, hostage-takers nearly always use force and fear to create a climate of terror that reinforces compliance and arrests a person's freedom (Mudaly & Goddard 2006). In Sarah's quote, any transgression of the rules by her mother could result in abuse being directed towards any of them. This threat to mother and children reinforces the likelihood of compliance.

The excessive rules that permeated the lives of families who lived with domestically abusive men were often confusing and nonsensical to participants. For example, Anna recounts the following rule set by her father:

> *The bath mat. You don't use the bath mat; it's for decoration. And I can remember thinking at the time that you are meant to stand on it and get*

dry. Isn't that what it is for? I can remember, I can remember thinking
– even as a child – thinking that's a bit odd.

While having to avoid the bath mat was confusing and nonsensical to Anna, compliance with this demand was a relatively easy action to implement to avoid tension, anger and violence. Other rules and demands were not as simple to comply with:

So, my dad has always had nice cars, and I have never been allowed to
be car sick. It wasn't a matter of whether or not I got motion sickness,
it was that I was not allowed to, and that if I was going to be physically
sick, he would refuse to believe that and not pull the car over. (Georgie)

The rule that Georgie is not allowed to become ill places her in a position of trying to avoid something that is almost completely out of her control. However, the rule also sent Georgie the message that her wellbeing and comfort is less important than the cleanliness of her father's car. Indiscriminate, unpredictable and unreasonable rule-making are also techniques that hostage-takers commonly use to subdue victims of capture crimes (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

In addition to exploiting children's position of dependency and micro-regulating their everyday lives in sometimes unpredictable and nonsensical ways, participants also discussed how fathers played the role of gatekeepers to the outside world. The next section explores how survivors experienced tactics of isolation.

5.3.2 Tactics of Isolation

Many of the participants discussed ways in which their fathers had contributed to their social isolation. One form of isolation experienced by many of the participants in this study resulted from an inability to bring friends into their homes for social interaction.

Um, you wouldn't take your friends there. Oh, you might when mum
was there, but, yes, but not when my father was there. (Zara)

Zara, as with many of the participants, limited the outside world coming into her home because of a fear of what her father might do. The ability to create an isolating and

hostile environment is another tactic that domestic abuse perpetrators and hostage-takers share (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

In addition to being unable to bring friends into their homes, the participants also discussed being unable to engage socially in the outside world:

We never went to anybody else's house. We weren't allowed to. Or we were just too poor, or we were never invited. Actually, the fact that we were coloured I suspect made it very difficult for us, because racism was a very big deal in our town. (Sarah)

By removing access to social support resources, abusers are able to entrap women and children in coercive environments by limiting their opportunities for resistance and assistance. For children who are living with domestic abuse, access to peer support is a protective factor (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Tajima, Herrenkohl, Moylan, & Derr, 2011). Research shows that diminished levels of social support associated with domestic abuse compound children's experiences of abuse, particularly for children from minority groups (Owen et al., 2009).

Another way in which fathers limited social interactions was by sabotaging events that brought friends and family together. Participants reported how fathers would sabotage special events which brought extended family members together for celebration:

Every birthday we had, mum would make a cake for my sister, and dad […] And then this cake, and this supposed celebration. Dad came to the party, and the violence— he upturned, well, we were only little tots, you know, and he upturned all that. And he put his fist in the middle of the cake. And, you know, that was terrible, that really was. (Liz)

Destroying celebrations is a tactic used by perpetrators to humiliate families and deter women and children from speaking to other family members. A similar finding was reported by Katz (2016), who found that mothers were reluctant to throw children's parties for fear of what fathers might do. This tactic is used to ensure that perpetrators can continue to control women and children with little interference from others (McLeod, 2018).

Participants also reported how fathers could disconnect any supportive relatives who threatened or questioned their control. Sabrina discusses an occasion where her

father's treatment of the family was questioned by her aunt, and how this resulted in her father severing all contact with the aunt:

> So, there was, there was that isolation, anyway, from family, but I know like, um, dad's sister and her husband criticised him, I think once about what was going on, like parenting and, not about mum, but I think about that he was very authoritarian or something. And he never spoke to them again, and we couldn't have contact with them until mum and dad divorced. So that was it for that, we lost that Aunt's influence pretty quick.

Accounts from this study support the findings of Katz (2016) that the control that perpetrators have as gatekeepers to the outside world severely restricts the ability of children to interact socially, develop peer networks, and engage with wider family. Such tactics of control also limit children's involvements with others through extra-curricular activities (Katz, 2016; McLeod, 2018).

Several participants also discussed how their ability to establish and maintain avenues of peer support were disrupted by frequently moving house:

> Every six months a different school, and so I'd get to meet people and become a bit friendly with them, but because we were moving to different geographic areas and I had to change schools, I never got to work out what happened next with those friendships […] you know, I was continually having different groups of friends, and I think it is because I didn't learn what happened to move past the acquaintance phase. (Maggie)

The frequent disruptions to Maggie's life, which result in her needing to re-establish new friendship groups at different schools, is cited as a barrier to her learning the social skills she feels would enable her to develop and maintain ongoing friendships.

In some situations, the participants theorised that fathers' decisions to move to a new house were a tactic used to maintain the secrecy of their violence:

> [My parents] got this big house with a pool, but everyone knew everyone's business, and I don't think it suited, and we have never discussed that, that is just my adult interpretation, 'cause I think we

> *lasted a few years and bounced back towards [place name] again,*
> *where people minded their own business a bit more. (Sabrina)*

Sabrina's father moved her family when awareness of his violence began to seep out of the concealment of their family and into the wider public arena, illustrating the entanglement of violence and secrecy.

5.3.3 Experiencing Deprivation

Deprivation refers to the deliberate act by perpetrators of depriving women and children of financial independence or material possessions to force dependency and restrict or deny liberty (Stark, 2012b). Deprivation is rooted in men's control over the family's access to basic necessities, such as food, money, housing, transportation, and health care (Stark, 2012b). The participants in the present study highlighted how economic abuse perpetrated by fathers further restricted their engagement in the wider world and reinforced participants' experiences of isolation:

> *You knew that you couldn't go on school excursions, because if it had a*
> *cost that wasn't covered by the free list, you just couldn't. (Michelle)*

In the above excerpt, Michelle shows how children become accustomed to their limited space of interaction, and sacrifice any hope of engaging in social or extra-curricular activities.

Participants' experiences of economic abuse extended beyond isolation to include deprivation of resources required for survival. Some participants discussed how they often went without essential items such as food and blankets, yet they also reported how funds were often available for non-essential items that fathers prioritised:

> *Money was for beer. Money wasn't for anything else. There must have*
> *been a little bit that was allowed for, you know, basic foods; as I say,*
> *you run out of everything. Everything, everything was affected by not—*
> *never had sheets on my bed. Always had a prickly blanket, what I called*
> *the army blanket, which was prickly. I still don't like wool, because it*
> *just, it does itch, but I just remember that old army blanket on the bed,*
> *and no pillow cases on the bed, but no one else did either. It's not like*
> *old poor Michelle, she didn't have that – no one did. Mum didn't have*

blankets, didn't have sheets, didn't have pillow cases. We just didn't have them. (Michelle)

Sarah also described how her father often used money for the purchase of alcohol despite her and her siblings going without food for days at a time. Sarah recalls her experience of hunger and deprivation and how it drove her to salivate in the backyard garden:

So we had tiny little plants, and you could count the strawberries on them. There might have been two or three, and when we were little kids we used to lie in the drain where the patch was and watch a strawberry getting ripe, and as soon as it got to white and big enough, we thought [whispering] "Oh, I'd like to get that strawberry." And so, when Mum and Dad went off to town, you would run up in the middle of the row to get it, but dad used to rake it, and you would leave footprints, so if he saw that, you would be in big trouble. So, we would pick the strawberry. And I only did this once. And I took it, and I ate it. […] I got the rake out and I raked all the rows, so it looked like no one had been there. But dad was too smart for that. He knew someone had been there, that is not the way he rakes. Well, that was the last time I ever took a strawberry, I can tell you now! Because, boy oh boy; he didn't kill us that day, but we all pretty much got a very bad flogging. And, ah, we never ever went in his garden again, or never asked for anything from it, or was given anything from it. So, yeah, it's funny the things that we did as kids, just for something to eat.

Sarah's story shows how physical violence is used to reinforce other types of abuse, such as deprivation. After receiving a "*very bad flogging*" Sarah never went into the garden again, but in addition to this she never asked for anything from it again either. Here, the abuse that Sarah sustained worked to silence her. Being silenced was a commonly cited experience among the participants.

5.3.4 Being Silenced

One of the most profound effects that participants reported about their experiences of controlling behaviour is how they were silenced:

> *I felt that I had no voice at that age. I didn't find my voice until I was a*
> *bit older. So, at that time, and this is quite a big thing really, and you*
> *probably heard this before, children in these situations, you can't speak.*
> *You can't speak up at home because it is dangerous, or because no one*
> *will listen to you. (Cat)*

Participants such as Cat repeatedly discussed how they were unable to talk about the abuse that was happening in their homes. The reasons behind silencing were complex and varied. For example, one of the early participants in this study, after reading the narrative, chose to withdraw her data because of feelings of disloyalty to her parents. Other participants discussed remaining silent for fear of being removed from families, and some cited shame as the reason they hid their experiences of abuse. The silencing that occurs for children is concerning given research shows that speaking about experiences of domestic abuse can ameliorate long term effects (Graham-Bermann et al., 2011; Howell et al., 2015).

In addition to not speaking about their experiences of abuse, participants' voices were often silenced in interactions within the home and family. Participants gave numerous examples of the ways in which they purposely constrained their emotions and self-expression. There was a clear sense that participants, as children, engaged in careful consideration of what to say and what not to say. Sam elaborates on an occasion in which she, along with her siblings and mother, was expected to clean up a mess in the kitchen after her father had thrown food around during an abusive tirade:

> *I just remember all of us having to get in and having to clean up the*
> *kitchen and being terrified and not, you know, feeling, I guess anger on*
> *the inside, but not being able to express it, because you knew that if you*
> *said anything or did anything that he'd backhand you or whatever.*

Sam constrained her voice and actions to avoid the possibility of further violence. Her actions provide a poignant example of how coercive control shapes children's spaces for action.

Participants also discuss how they felt their mothers were complicit in their silencing. Indy recounts a time when the unreality of silence in the aftermath of violence was almost too much for her to bear:

I remember sitting there in the morning, sometimes it was a weekend, and mum would get up and she would have a black eye or cut on her face or fat lip or— And I remember sitting there and, and they're just continuing on like nothing has happened. They are having their cups of tea and they're business as usual. And I remember sitting there and thinking, "What the hell is going on here, Mum? He is sober now, get up and smack him over the head with something." You know. "Why aren't you yelling at him now and saying, "This is what you did to me!" Yeah. But it was like, yeah, the physical wounds were there, but it was business as usual. It was quite, yeah, strange. And I'd be sitting there thinking, I just want to stab him with that kitchen knife, you bastard. And I'd be just seething on the inside at what I would see mum looking like. And she was like, "Are you making me a cup of tea, darl?" Just business as usual. Life went on.

This scenario highlights the pervasiveness of coercive control to entrap individuals in "a world of confusion, contradiction and fear" (Candela, 2016, p. 115). In the morning, when the atmosphere appeared amicable, the topic of domestic abuse or acknowledgement of injuries continued to be unspeakable. Indy gives insight into the confusing and tumultuous thoughts that were imprisoned in her mind, while at the same time engaging in acting out the scene of a happy family breakfast. The reality of domestic abuse is pushed again into secrecy, and the power of the 'or else' proviso (Stark, 2007) is reinforced while the control of the perpetrator is strengthened.

This section has highlighted how the status of children as dependent on parents is a constraint that makes it difficult for children to move away from violence, and limits how they can respond to abuse (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). Mudaly and Goddard (2006, p. 120) compare children's experiences of abuse in the home to a "private holocaust" from which there is no escape. Often, the only way in which participants could break free from the entrapment of childhood domestic abuse was for them to permanently leave the family home. Many of the participants who contributed to this study did leave their homes as soon as they were old enough to live independently. For example, Kelly left home at 14, and even left Australia to get away from her family. Michelle was 15, Rachael was 17 and still completing her higher education. Liz was 16 when she got a job, and comments that, "*I thought, right, I've*

got a job and I'm off!" Billie was 14 when she went to live on a remote cattle station, and recalls, "*I left and went away as far as I could. It was awesome.*" Indy also discusses leaving home at 16 to escape the violence and fear that was rife in her family home. The fact that participants left home as soon as they could makes clear how the intersection of age and kinship works to compound children's experiences of domestic abuse. These findings suggest that children are waiting for an opportunity to free themselves from their entrapment as soon as dependency is no longer a barrier. Studies show that in such situations of abuse and subjugation, children put their lives on hold, and wait to 'start living' once they are free from patriarchal terrorism (Överlien, 2013). Such actions are similar to strategies used by prisoners (Stark, 2006). These experiences of entrapment and credible threat significantly constrain children's liberty.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this chapter show that it is inaccurate to limit children's experiences of domestic abuse to witnessing their fathers' violence towards mothers. The participants' accounts suggest that survivors experience their childhoods as embedded within an everyday context of power and control. Further, the stories presented in this chapter indicate that survivors suffered childhood domestic abuse directly, not as collateral damage resulting from 'being exposed' to the abuse of their mothers. Participants detailed tactics of abuse that denied them respect and autonomy, and reduced their opportunities for social connectedness, and their access to resources. Through intimidation, participants' human rights were limited, and their everyday experiences of childhood were overshadowed by the omnipresence of their fathers' coercion and control. Tactics of coercive control facilitated a ubiquity of intimidation, fuelled by an implicit daily threat of surveillance, degradation and violence. These threats created a context of psychological abuse and control that constrained participants' ability to feel at ease in their homes, and an ever-present need to pre-empt and manage the perpetrators' needs. Considering these findings, the next chapter details how, in this broader context of children's experiences, participants actively respond to and resist the perpetration of childhood domestic abuse.

Chapter 6.   Responding to Domestic Abuse

The accounts presented in the Chapter 5 challenge the idea of distilling children's experiences of domestic abuse down to occasions of 'witnessed' incidents of physical violence. Conversely, the findings from this study suggest that children experience domestic abuse as relationally embedded within their everyday lives through operations of power and control. Using this perspective, I now illustrate in this chapter how participants responded to domestic abuse by engaging strategies of resistance.

Participants' narratives of domestic abuse were temporally structured. Nearly all of the narratives began with earlier experiences of domestic abuse and followed a trajectory that ended in their adult lives. This chapter use these temporal accounts to show how participants' earliest responses circumvented the risks presented by the abuse of fathers. I explore the multiple strategies that participants used to prevent, manage and minimise violence in their families, and the active way in which, as children, they secured the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others.

6.1   STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

In each of the narratives, the participants describe how they actively used protective strategies of resistance that sought to maintain some equilibrium in the home by pre-empting abuse or attempting to prevent its intensification. As the narratives progressed, they revealed a trajectory that highlighted how participants moved beyond protective strategies of resistance to overtly oppose their fathers' domestic abuse. The following sub-sections explore these different response strategies.

6.1.1 Using Protective Strategies

Motivated by the need to remain safe within an everyday context of abuse, participants recounted that their early childhoods were predominated by protecting themselves and other family members. In this section, the participants' accounts show

children responding to abuse by pre-empting and mitigating risks, finding places of safety, preparing for the unpredictable, constraining reactions, and using creative means to provide an escape from oppression.

Pre-empting and Mitigating Risk

The action most often described by the participants was assessing the likelihood of danger and making the necessary preparations to mitigate its effects. Anna elaborates:

> *I think it was self-preservation. Well, not just self-preservation; it was broader than that. It was harm minimisation. If I had to put a label on it: minimising the harm. Not just self-preservation, but preserving peace for myself and others.*

Anna's quote begins with the term 'self-preservation', which is defined as "the protection of oneself from harm or death" (Oxford Dictionary, 2019, np). However, Anna, after some consideration, finds this term too narrow, and broadens her description to include 'harm minimisation'. The term 'harm minimisation' developed in 1985 as part of a theory underpinning Australia's national drug strategy (Mendes, 2001). Harm minimisation is a value-neutral approach that accepts drug use as inevitable and thus views reducing harmful practices as an effective response to this societal problem (Mendes, 2001). By adopting the terms 'self-preservation' and 'harm minimisation', Anna gives insight into her need as a child to look after herself and her family, and to reduce the impact of her father's inevitable abuse.

For most of the participants, actions of pre-emption and mitigation could occur at any point during the day, but some common cues were cited across their narratives. For example, many describe experiencing a sense of anxiousness when anticipating their father's arrival home:

> *So, it was alright when dad wasn't home, but as soon as you heard his car pull into the drive – I think I speak for the three of us [children], certainly, this was my experience – I would sit up, look around, "What needs to be tidied or put away?", or "What would upset dad?' um, yeah. So it was that kind of, "This could turn at any moment," sort of thing. (Anna)*

Anna's understanding that things "*could turn at any moment*" is indicative of the psychological shift that children undergo when preparing themselves for their fathers' return. Participants conducted audits of their environments by scanning for things that could trigger abusive actions by fathers and eliminating those risks. The act of watching for 'coming home time' is also reported in other studies about childhood domestic abuse as a time in which children mentally prepare themselves to respond to the possibility of control, abuse and violence (Callaghan et al., 2015; Mullender et al., 2002). While it is possible to interpret these actions as a response to coercive control, they also highlight how children actively and adaptively engage in mitigating violence and abuse in the home.

Once fathers were home, the participants continued to employ protective strategies aimed at pre-empting and mitigating the escalation of abuse. For Sabrina, reading her father became part of her everyday experience, supplanting other typical childhood activities:

> *Yeah, and you are tense, and he would come in, and you would wait for him to speak, or look at his face, or, you know. I still remember that. And the smell – and to this day I cannot stand the smell of beer on a man. To this day! It was kind of life, too; it was so much, for another, a kid, a part of life might have been learning cartwheels. Part of my life was just learning how to, one, read him, and two, get out of the way.*

Sabrina's reference to her ability to "*read*" her father describes her developed ability to detect, identify and assess his verbal and nonverbal communication. Research on the role of body language in communication shows that assessments of how people speak (tone of voice, emphasis, expression, volume, pitch) and of body language (posture, eye contact, expression, movements, gestures and touch) make up 93 per cent of the meaning derived through communication (Patel, 2014). Children who live with domestic abuse rely on their ability to read everyday situations for evidence that may help them to predict and prepare for danger (Callaghan et al., 2016; Callaghan et al., 2017; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Swanston et al., 2014). However, as Sabrina's reference to smell indicates, the assessment of danger by children goes beyond verbal and non-verbal communication and extends to a broader contextual analysis of their environments.

During their childhoods, participants attuned to contextual cues. In some circumstances, participants describe almost intuitive responses that existed at a sub-conscious level:

There was always a trigger, and I noticed that even more as I got older. As a very young child, it wasn't a conscious thing, but as the years went by you recognised the triggers for it, and you knew that once alcohol started to be consumed, there was a point where it turned into violence, and you could just pick it every time. You would think, stop drinking, stop drinking, please, everybody stop drinking. We all know what is going to happen. So before that happened, I would try and find a place that was safe. But some of the time this was not always possible, and I would find myself in the middle of it. (Sarah)

Learning how to recognise these contextual triggers, such as the consumption of alcohol, is critical for children in assessing safety. The identification of the presence of alcohol is an astute assessment by children, given that there is an association between the consumption of alcohol and the frequency and severity of domestic abuse (World Health Organisation, 2006). Being aware of potential danger is critical for assessing risk, and allowed the participants a window of opportunity to seek safety.

Finding Places of Safety

The strategy of finding a safe place is sometimes minimised and simplified in professional literature through the use of the term 'hiding' (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015). Consequently, the act of finding safety is often described in a way that suggests a helpless and passive child cowering under the bed in fear (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015). However, the narratives in the present study paint a different picture.

Finding safer places was one of the participants' most commonly described protective strategies. At one point, Sarah theorised that of the 18 years she spent living with her abusive father, she spent at least a decade of that time hiding. All the participants discussed specific places they retreated to for safety or protection:

I think, in my home, I wanted it to be my place of security, but it wasn't. My place of security was actually in the hay shed. (Kelly)

It is clear from the narratives that places of safety were used by participants to reduce their visibility. Kelly describes how the hay shed provided a place in which she could disappear when needed:

> *It felt safe, um, the advantage of it in some way was that I could sit anywhere amongst the hay bales. 'Cause, you know, if, you know, hay bales, they are not all stacked up, all neat, you've got where hay's pulled out, you've got holes and crevices, and I could sit there and I could see out, but I could easily, quickly go like that [mimes ducking out of view] so I couldn't be seen.*

Kelly sat in the safety of the hay shed because she could see out and also tuck herself away between bales to be undetectable when needed. Securing physical safety, such as protection from violence, is identified by Maslow (1968) as the primary survival need, following satisfaction of basic physiological needs, such as food, air and shelter. The actions that children take to find places of safety in contexts of domestic abuse is a vivid illustration of their protective coping strategies (Joseph et al., 2006).

By obfuscating themselves from perpetrators, participants engaged in protective strategies that reduced their chance of being directly physically abused by making themselves inaccessible. However, in addition to this form of protection, places of safety also provide a reprieve from experiences of non-physical abuse and coercive control:

> *I think, as we got older, we could find places to hide from all the ugliness that was going on […] there was long grass next door, and it was used for hiding, not from just the violence in the house, but from all the other abuse that we suffered as well; so it wasn't just physical abuse. We really went through very, very, hard times. (Sarah)*

Sarah's comments show that seeking out places of safety can provide children with a space away from the "*ugliness*" of the everyday experiences of childhood domestic abuse.

Moving to safer spaces, either physically or mentally, was a strategy that places distance between participants and the abuse they endured. This distance appeared to mitigate the impact of the surveillance, degradation and subjugation of childhood domestic abuse described in the previous chapter:

As a whole, I think that moving yourself away from the situations, even if it is physically or mentally, just to give you time to still everything so that you are not constantly on edge, and so you can think clearly. Because you get all these different competing, um, thoughts, and it is confusing, and confusion is tiring. It is exhausting, it is really exhausting. I think I get most exhausted when I am confused about a decision I need to make, 'cause I always weigh everything up so carefully. But, you know. (Kelly)

Kelly highlights how, when in places of safety, she engaged in an internal struggle of making sense of her experience of living with childhood domestic abuse. She used the distance she created from her father's abuse to "*still everything*" and find some clarity away from the exhausting experience of hypervigilance. In actively creating time in these spaces, Kelly engaged in an intersubjective process by assessing competing ideas about what was happening in her family life, and, in doing so, constructed meaning about her experience of childhood domestic abuse.

In spaces that create a stilling of the world, participants were able to resist and challenge the impact of coercive control. Kelly explains what these spaces provide for children who live in pervasive and ongoing contexts of abuse and violence:

[They provide] time to think, time to have my own thoughts, not to be told who I am, what I am, what I am not, what I have to do, what I haven't done right. I could have my own thoughts. I could think about people I had met and how I could help them. I could think about other people's lives.

In this passage, Kelly describes using the distance she created from the context of domestic abuse to actively engage in her own thoughts of who she is and what she can do. In this way, Kelly disrupted the establishment of a negative identity, and instead created or reinforced a different territory of identity for herself as a person with something to offer others. Kerig (2003) suggests that one of the most useful strategies for children in mitigating the impact of domestic abuse is to construct images of themselves as copers rather than victims of abuse.

In addition to places of reflection, participants also used places of safety in situations that required immediate refuge from violence. Nearly all the participants had

locations committed to memory that they could access when immediate safety was required. However, age appeared to be a significant factor influencing the accessibility of safer places. Sarah details the range of places of safety she used, depending on her need:

I know that I found hiding places, and our house didn't have a ceiling in all of the rooms, like our room only had rafters. It was never finished. We'd just lived in this little shanty type of house. And, um, I know that we used to climb up the walls and go on the rafters and walk across and hide down the back of the ceiling, or up in the chook pen; it was for a whole host of reasons. It wasn't just to get away from people who were hurting us. As said earlier, when we were really little, we just hid under the bed. We would all gather into one corner under the bed; it was high enough that we could all get under it, because mum would flee the house after being beaten up, and the boys, they would run down to the bush.

As Sarah's account demonstrates, older children appeared to have greater access to places of safety than young children, who were often contained to the home or limited by their smaller and weaker bodies. In addition to age and physical ability, urgency also influences the use of safer places.

In many instances, participants establishing themselves in places of safety was a slow and considered response; in situations where domestic abuse rapidly escalated without notice, however, participants sought safety urgently:

I always watch television shows, and some television shows do it really well, and they will have like the kids, sort of just, very quietly moved, to me that is how it happens. Right, there's this explosive thing, and everyone sort of just [signals moving away). "Don't you, don't you two start", there is none of that. There are no interjections. We would just— off you go. We, we left before the hitting started. Or sometimes there might be a slap or something if we were really a bit slow or very involved in Starsky & Hutch at the time [laughs], a bit slow on the uptake then, and then you'd run. Like, if the slap happened, you would actually run, but otherwise, I still remember that very quietness of it. (Sabrina)

Sabrina captures how the pre-empting and mitigating responses link to strategies of finding safer places. "*Before the hitting starts*", Sabrina's kinaesthetic senses, and her awareness of the rhythms of her parents' tones and actions, allowed her and her siblings to detect signs of danger. In response, Sabrina and her siblings retreated to safer spaces in the home by silently moving from the shared space to more secure areas. However, if caught off guard, getting to safe spaces became a matter of urgency, and prompted children to flee. Such responses are often reported in the professional literature as 'avoidant' or 'escapist' strategies (Joseph et al., 2006), but these are the responses that keep children safe in their homes. Studies have shown that children are far more likely to be either intentionally or accidentally injured in situations where they are near to physical abuse (Kerig, 2003).

My study shows that finding safe places was far from a passive form of escapism for participants. While the professional literature often recognises children's acts of hiding, what is often not acknowledged is that children also forsake their areas of safety to deliberately re-emerge into scenes of violence. Most of the occasions in which participants detailed using safe places in the event of an escalation of abuse describe how, after the incident, they re-enter the scene of violence:

> *Um, so sometimes at night when things were just too bad, I would just walk out of the house and go walking around the streets for an hour or something until I felt like, "I think I can go back and deal with this now, maybe it will be blown over." At least I have not had to listen to it for a while, and always feeling sick when you went home, but just knowing that at least you had got away from it for a little bit. (Cat)*

Cat's comment about "*always feeling sick*" when returning home indicates the pervasive and ongoing anxiousness that childhood domestic abuse causes children. Relinquishing places of safety and returning to scenes of violence again highlights children as actively engaged in contexts of domestic abuse. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, participants discussed occasions where they emerged from their bedrooms or other places of refuge from violence to respond to their mothers in various states of injury or consciousness. Such stories demonstrate the ongoing and pervasiveness of childhood domestic abuse, and reveal finding places of safety as one strategy embedded in a series of responses that interlink when children live with domestic abuse.

The accounts presented in this section so far show how children are attuned to the emotional temperature of the home, are ready to react, are active in pre-empting and mitigating violence, and agentic in protecting themselves and others in their families. The pre-emptive strategies outlined above are dependent on a child's ability to read and respond to predictable triggers and patterns of behaviour. Finding places of safety has touched on children's responses to unpredictable violence – the next section elaborates on this type of response in more detail.

Responding to the Unpredictable

The unpredictability of fathers' violence sometimes made accurate pre-emptive assessments difficult, if not impossible. The accounts presented in this section show how the unpredictability of fathers' violence destabilises the sense of control that children have in their ability to pre-empt violence, and outlines how they respond by adopting a 'watch-guard' role.

Often, experiences of domestic abuse were difficult to predict. In some situations, participants had no warning, and were pulled into the centre of abusive encounters. For example, Linda was once awoken by her father during the night to attend to her mother's injuries:

> *One night he woke me up late about […] "Get up! Get up and help your mother!" And I went into the bedroom and mum had miscarried from her beating that she had just got, and I had to clean up— a big clot of blood, and I am assuming that it was the foetus there, I don't know, 'cause I was too young to understand what was going on. But she had a big clot of blood on her bed. [Mum] was just there with her legs up like this and big clot there. He just walked outside and left us, so yeah. It just didn't even register with me what it was. All I did was just clean it up. I wasn't scared. I wasn't frightened. I just cleaned it up.*

For Linda, there were no cues to prepare her for involvement with the outcome of her father's violence. In this scenario, Linda was far from a passive victim or bystander to adult intimate partner violence. Instead, she readily adapted and responded to the needs of her mother. The idea that her father could inflict such harm on her pregnant mother, wake his daughter to "*clean it up*" and then walk outside is telling of just how actively

embedded in a context of abuse children can be. In this scenario, Linda was an active part of the solution to her father's violence.

While Linda was calm and methodological in responding to the needs of her mother, other participants were caught off guard by unpredictable abuse, and found themselves unprepared:

> *The few times, though, that I really got upset was when things happened, and my assessment, my judgement, hadn't picked up that I was in danger or that someone was in danger. I think it was me. I think it was my danger I was assessing, but I always felt like that I was just assessing the mood or something. But, um, and I think they are types [of violence] that stick with you more. (Sabrina)*

Sabrina, as with other participants, noted how violence that seemed to occur out of the blue or without any discernible cues created lasting memories. Being unable to predict violence accurately undermines the strategies that children construct to manage their experiences and minimise the impact of abuse (Noble-Carr et al., 2017). The idea that there are things that can be done to stop or minimise violence appeared to provide an important sense of control for participants. Other studies have also highlighted that the unpredictability of violence proves difficult for children to make sense of (Noble-Carr et al., 2017; Överlien, 2013).

The unpredictability of abuse reinforced participants' hypervigilance. Fear that violence and abuse could happen at any time drew participants into an ongoing pattern of vigilance and protection where they felt a duty to keep others in the home safe:

> *Looking back, I had this fear that if I was taken from this home that mum would be in more danger. I was like this person who was there to make sure that she was okay. So I sort of fell into a role of feeling responsible for making sure that I was the one that would make sure that she lived another day. (Indy)*

This excerpt reinforces the high degree of danger involved in living with domestic abuse. On average, one woman each week is murdered by an intimate partner (Bryant & Bricknell, 2017), indicating that participants had legitimate grounds to fear for their mothers' lives. Keenly aware of the risks that fathers posed, the participants' narratives

are not merely focussed on minimising harm to themselves; they show that children adopt a position in which they assume a responsibility to keep their mothers alive.

Some participants went to great lengths to protect their mothers. For example, Rachael sacrificed the option of living in the loving and safe home of her grandmother to instead endure the sexual and physical abuse of her step-father in order to be on hand to protect her mother, brother and baby sister:

> *I didn't spend as much time with grandparents when I was a teenager*
> *because my brother and I used to try to be home to protect our mother.*
> *You get, as children, you don't think about it, you just want to help –*
> *that's your mum!*

Rachael's choices and actions were far from passive. She relinquished the opportunity to live in an environment of safety and love to instead be on hand to monitor and protect her mother and her siblings from the abuse of her step-father. Worrying about the safety of mothers and determining ways of assisting mothers to avoid harm were common strategies also identified in previous studies with children (Katz, 2014; Mullender et al., 2002).

Many other participants also discussed passing up opportunities for reprieve through school excursions, extra-curricular activities or school camps for fear of what might happen to their mothers while they were away:

> *But they had camps and everything, and I didn't go 'cause— I didn't*
> *even go to me formal or nothing, no, because I wanted to be at home*
> *with my mum. So, and everyone goes, "Sharon, you should be going out*
> *and gettin' a life." But when it comes to your mother and watching your*
> *own mother getting belted and beaten. No thanks. […] I was like a*
> *second mother [laughs]. A little watch-guard. That's what mum's sister*
> *used to call me, Aunty, "You are [you mum's] little watch-guard aren't*
> *you, darlin'." I'd say, "Yes, aunt." (Sharon)*

Similar findings are reported by Swanston et al. (2014, p. 189), who found children are often "constantly thinking about what might happen to them or others in their family and what the perpetrator might do next, trying to work out his hidden intentions". Separation from perpetrators, rather than giving a sense of reprieve, can

cause victims to feel more vulnerable because of a reliance on proximate cues to detect and respond to threats and violence (Stark, 2007).

When children commit to being present in the home in case violence occurs, they are at increased risk of experiencing ongoing abuse, as well as incidents of physical violence. During these times, the participants found themselves actively constraining reactions when directly engaged in the physical abuse occurring between their parents.

Constraining Reaction

Participants who found themselves directly engaged in physical incidents continued to be motivated to protect other family members. While some of the existing literature has depicted children as passive bystanders who are exposed to violence, the accounts in the present study show that children actively constrain their responses as a way of protecting mothers and other family members:

> *Every time I reacted it would just, instead of taking it out on me, he took*
> *it out on mum again. So, you know, everything just had to be held inside.*
> *You couldn't— you couldn't react, because you knew that he would take*
> *it out on mum. You just had to sit there and take it. Your throat closes*
> *up, it just closes you up, and you just had to sit there and take it. Tears*
> *run down your face because of frustration. (Linda)*

This excerpt shows how a child's decision not to intervene cannot be accurately understood as a passive response. Linda vividly describes how she actively and purposefully engaged in self-constraint in the face of her father's abuse in order to manage the safety of herself and others. These stories are not of children passively 'witnessing' domestic abuse; they are accounts of difficult, considered, carefully controlled responses designed to minimise harm and reduce risk to themselves and their mothers.

Many of the participants discussed how they could escape and resist oppressive home environments, even within the confines of their entrapment as children dependent on adults in families. For some participants, imagination provided an avenue for resistance and opposition to abuse and oppression.

Using Imagination to Resist Abuse and Oppression

Escape through fantasy appeared to be one of the few ways in which participants could actively step out of their experiences of entrapment and feel a sense of power and control:

> *I used to use the stories in my childhood and alter the endings so that the child had some power. 'Cause one of the big things I felt in my childhood is that I didn't have any power to change anything. (Ellen)*

Escaping into the worlds of other stories through books creates distance between victims and the oppression of domestic abuse, and works to reduce experiences of negative arousal (Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

The use of imagination provided a window to a place of freedom, safety and sometimes retribution. Chris narrated a story whereby he was able to be the subjugator of his father. Chris used imagination to create scenarios where he could experience having some power over his father:

> *I'd put him to work. So I would be in bed, with a tanned hide or whatever, and I'd make him work, work hard. There was a, ah, capstan, you know normally that you were, have horses that would turn a capstan with a bucket on the end that's pulling water up out of a well, or grinding grain or something. So I would take the horses away and make him grind the grain. I probably gave him a flogging while he was at it as well. You need a break, hey? Well, take that! Whack! [mimes whipping].*

Chris used his imagination to turn the tables and elevate himself to a position where he had some authority and control over his father. Chris orchestrated a scenario in which his father is made to experience a similar lived experience to his own, dominated by unfair and unnecessary forms of oppression from which there is no reprieve. The participants' use of fantasy is similar to strategies reportedly used by other children to create some distance from the reality of childhood domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

For some of the participants, the fantasy of ending their father's life became the ultimate way of envisaging the end of his abuse:

I sometimes envisaged, as a kid, sometimes just picking up the saucepan and hitting him on the head with it, and he would drop dead. I actually did, you know, because I couldn't imagine any other way that I could do it. I didn't envisage picking up a gun and pulling the trigger or anything like that, but I just thought, you know, it would be so quick and it would be over, and that would be the end of that, and our lives would be okay again. That's a pretty out there thing to be thinking as a kid, I reckon. It didn't appear at that time that there was a way out, that there was a way for all of us to escape. (Cat)

The use of imagination to plan or visualise the death of fathers was reasonably frequent in narratives. The use of this strategy by participants indicates the profound sense of powerlessness resulting from their status as children. Highlighting a sense of entrapment, patricide, the act of killing one's father, appeared to Cat to be the only solution that could offer her family escape. It is in such findings that the differences between powerlessness and passivity are revealed. Even when every scope of action appears to be curtailed, participants draw on their imaginations to actively resist the impacts of the perpetration of abuse. Such actions are the result of a sense of powerlessness that emerges through the intersection of the social location of childhood and adultism as a system of oppression. Indeed, research shows that one group of individuals who do commit patricide are children who are severely abused and pushed beyond their limits (Heide, 1992).

This section has outlined protective responses survivors used to circumvent the risks to themselves and their families inherent in environments of everyday domestic abuse. Many of these responses have been devalued in the literature as emotion-coping responses, or interpreted as passivity. However, the findings presented above suggest that children's actions are far from passive. Considering children's experiences of domestic abuse to be pervasive and ongoing, and understanding the context to be one of entrapment, reveals a division between powerlessness and passivity. However, as their narratives progressed, they revealed that participants also took up various ways of responding that sought to directly oppose the abuse perpetrated by fathers. The next section provides examples of responses to domestic abuse that directly oppose the actions of perpetrators.

6.1.2 Using Oppositional Strategies to Resist Abuse

As the narratives progressed, participants' actions revealed a shift away from protecting themselves, mothers or siblings and towards challenging their fathers' perceived right to act violently. A subtle shift in the motivation behind the actions of participants is perceptible in how participants narrated their experiences. Protective responses were driven primarily by fear entrenched through intimidation; fear of physical abuse, fear of degradation, and fear of being caught transgressing rules. Oppositional strategies, while still often fear-based, were also motivated by anger. The strategies described in this section include speaking out against the violence, encouraging mothers to leave violent relationships, and physically intervening to stop the escalation of abuse.

Speaking Out Against Abuse and Control

The latter sections of the narratives contained more stories that outlined occasions in which participants spoke up about the violence and abuse occurring in families. As discussed in the previous chapter, feeling silenced is a common experience for children, and is linked to conflicted loyalties, love, fear and shame that compel children who experience abuse to keep violence a secret. Children are also often aware of the dangers that speaking out about violence poses for themselves and their families (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015). As such, the act of speaking up against abuse represents a powerful form of resistance to fathers' oppressive control..

Speaking back to fathers about their violence and abuse appeared to occur when participants moved from feeling predominantly fearful to feeling both fear and a great deal of anger:

> *I sort of switched from being fearful to being aggressive. And, I remember, there was one time when we had this glass table in our lounge room in the middle of the floor, and I remember I was doing something at the glass table, and my step-dad was having a go with mum in the kitchen, and I remember I yelled out something like, "Oh, for fuck's sake, can't you stop it!" Like I had become quite brave with some of the— I got to the stage where it, where I probably had some balls and I was trying to stand up for mum. (Indy)*

Rather than pre-empting or weathering abuse, Indy's attention was on eliminating the violence. Indy called her step-father to account for his behaviour by demanding that he "*stop it*". Indy describes her oppositional response of speaking back to her father as the result of an increasing sense of bravery. The hierarchical power structure of families makes it difficult for most children to invert the traditional role of the parent–child relationship in a way where the child issues a directive to the father (Wade, 1997). When the threat of violence is added to this equation, the act of speaking up against a father's use of violence becomes an extreme act of resistance (Wade, 1997).

Directly calling fathers out on their use of control, abuse and violence appeared to provide a breakthrough moment for some participants. The act of speaking back to perpetrators about abuse appeared to reduce feelings of powerlessness, and provided greater confidence to enact further agency:

> *I had a go at him, and it was the first time that I had ever spoken back to him, and it was literally that his jaw dropped. And from then on, he didn't have a, he didn't have a hold on me. Well, I was going to say he never did, but obviously he did. But I felt that I had released something by standing up to him and saying, "You're ridiculous." That was a real set change. Because having gone [gives middle finger gesture], it broke something. It broke some hold, it broke some power; it broke something. Or it was just me going, "Oh for fuck's sake, this is ridiculous. I have had it." Either he changed in how he interacted with me, or I didn't allow him to do that anymore, or both. (Anna)*

Like Indy, Anna demonstrated a shift from being a peacekeeping and compliant daughter to someone who demanded behavioural changes from her father. Instead of fearing her father's unpredictable and non-negotiable rules, Anna viewed his micromanagement as "*ridiculous*". Anna redefined her relationship with her father and reauthored herself as someone agentic who would no longer allow her father to wield all the power. In this moment, Anna resisted the coercive control perpetrated by her father, and in doing so glimpsed her own ability to effect change.

Some participants' recognition of their agency arose alongside a recognition of the limits of their father's control:

Um, there just was that kind of cut through moment that "hang on a second, I can say something about this, I can, I can do something about this." Um, I recognised that I can, there will be moments when I can make this different, and it won't be all the time, but there will be moments when I can do something. I can do something. I can be active. I don't need to be passive. I don't need to be a receptacle of what is happening to me. I can push back. I can diverge. I can walk that way. And every time I did one of those things, it demonstrated to me "ah, you can do that!" [...] I suppose I relearned. I unlearned the, um, the stuff about "I have no control over this". (Cat)

Cat's account here highlights an evolving process of meaning-making about herself and her father. Cat began to view her father as a less monolithic entity, and herself as someone who had more power than she realised. By giving voice to these utterances about the self, people open up new possibilities for how the self is understood (Samelius, Thapar-Björkert, & Binswanger, 2014). In a similar way, Cat created a new narrative of self that cast her as agentic. She understood herself as someone who could "*push back*" and change the context of abuse. In doing so, Cat reconfigured her identity from someone who is powerless and instead challenged and broadened the scope of her power in the family and in her relationship with her father. Similar breakthrough moments were experienced when participants elicited the assistance of people outside the context of their families.

Involving Other People

In addition to directly speaking back to perpetrators, participants also told stories about speaking to people outside their families about the abuse. One response to abuse that participants used to directly oppose violence in their families included involving emergency services. Several of the participants recalled making the decision to call the police. Indy describes one such occasion:

I'd never called the police or called the ambulance or anything like that, and this time I ran. We didn't have the phone on at home, so I ran, and I ran down to the phone box, which was a couple of blocks away, and dialled 000 for someone to come, 'cause I thought mum was dead.

Calling emergency services to attend to domestic abuse is a significant undertaking for children (Noble-Carr et al., 2017; Överlien, 2013). Many of the participants had discussed a range of fears associated with disclosing violence in their homes. Children who live with domestic abuse are keenly aware that talking to professionals is risky, and might increase danger (Overlien, 2013). One of the key fears for participants when they were children was that awareness of the abuse would result in their removal by Child Protective Services. The fears that children and mothers have about the statutory removal of children from families is well documented in other studies (see, for example, Humphreys, 2001, 2008; McGee, 1997; Mullender et al., 2002). However, when the fear of what might happen to mothers outweighed such consequences, as in the above passage narrated by Indy, participants reached out to external sources of support.

In addition to speaking back to perpetrators and reaching out to external supports, participants discussed speaking to mothers about the domestic abuse. The act of speaking to mothers about the abuse perpetrated by fathers is often difficult for children. Research has shown that a conspiracy of silence regularly exists between mothers and children, in which both children and mothers refrain from discussing the existence of abuse as a way of protecting each other (Mullender et al., 2002; Thiara & Humphreys, 2015). Consequently, only a minority of women and children actually speak to one another about their shared experiences of domestic abuse (McGee, 2000). Despite these challenges, findings from this study show that participants were committed to helping their mothers exit violent relationships. Linda recalls persuading her mother to leave her father:

[I'd say] "Mum, why are you there? You've got these two little children," whose [Linda's sister] was along by now, "You've got these two little children. They need you more than he does. Why are you putting up with that, when they need you?" So they split.

Exiting a domestically abusive relationship is a complex and dangerous process for women. When leaving violent relationships women's risk of harm from the perpetrator

can increase, they may experience a diminishment of resources, an increase in harassment (Catallo, Jack, Ciliska, & Macmillan, 2012) and maternal alienation (Morris, 2009). Despite these risks, many participants continued as adults, and indeed some were continuing at the time of the interviews, to support their mothers to separate from abusive intimate partners. As Linda's example shows, in some instances, participants were successful in encouraging mothers to leave violent relationships.

In this study, while participants often directed anger and blame at mothers for staying with violent partners, most of the participants who discussed encouraging their mothers to leave were fearful for the safety of mothers or were cognisant of the negative impact the abuse had on mothers. Georgie describes her developing awareness of the damage that living with abuse had had on her mother:

> *I really thought that there was something there to be held on to, and after spending time alone with mum, I realised, "Oh, my God, no!" Like, we have to go. I told her that if she didn't divorce him that I would run away, and I'd never tell where I went, and I would just leave. And she knew that I would do that, I was 100 per cent serious, I probably would have just gone to live with my brothers. I mean realistically that is what I would have done. Um, she understood then that she had to leave, so we did the same thing, we looked at, we were looking at the dates where, um, where he was going away and started to plan.*

Georgie drew on her connection with her mother to persuade her to leave the abusive relationship. Once the decision to leave had been made, Georgie also assisted and supported her mother in planning to exit the home during a time when her father would be away. These actions demonstrate how children are actively involved in resisting the ongoing perpetration of abuse by speaking to mothers about their own fears and concerns. Far from powerless, children can sometimes use their influence and connection to help change both their own and their mothers' experiences of domestic abuse.

When children speak up against their father's abuse, by either speaking back to abusers, summoning outside supports, or encouraging mothers to leave violent relationships, they challenge perpetrators' control. In doing so, children are at increased risk of physical and psychological harm (Stark, 2007). However, when the risks of violence outweigh the safety of remaining silent, or when the injustice of

violence became too emotive, the participants used their voices to resist the perpetration of abuse, protect family members, and effect change. A further oppositional strategy that placed participants at significant risk was their active and direct intervention to prevent physical harm.

Directly Intervening

Several of the participants described physically preventing or subverting violence. Some used their physical presence, while others used force:

> *I went out into the laundry where the noise was coming from, and so, my dad had a knife at my mum's throat, and, um, my mum was yelling at him, and my dad was yelling at her, and so this had obviously been going on for some time, and so I just stood there and yelled at them both, "Just stop it, just stop it, just stop it," and "Just leave my mum alone," and so, ah, so that broke that violence. [...] I remember dad yelling at me, and, so that was, um, I was then put back in the room. (Billie)*

This scene of violence was fraught with danger; weapon-use increases the risk of children being injured during domestically violent incidents, whether in the form of severe direct physical harm or psychological trauma (Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007). Despite the presence of a knife, Billie disrupted the violence by redirecting her father's attention from her mother and onto herself. This strategy presented some serious risks for Billie, who placed herself in the centre of the violence to protect her mother. Some research suggests that children's intervention can result in them being assaulted or accidently injured during the assault (Georgsson, Almqvist, & Broberg, 2011b). Figures suggest that one third of children injured in domestic abuse incidents are hit by perpetrators when trying to defend their mothers (Blanchard, Molloy, & Brown, 1992; Flood & Fergus, 2008). Directly intervening to stop violence is a strategy commonly used by children. In a study by Mullender et al. (2002), over half of the 54 children they interviewed described directly intervening to stop violence.

Billie was successful in disrupting the abuse and was not physically injured, but other participants were less fortunate. Sarah describes how things can go wrong when children intervene in a violent assault;

I can remember once dad was beating mum up. We were all standing around in the kitchen, all the kids, and we were just standing there. Must have been when I was eight or nine, and I jumped in the middle. That was the last time I jumped in the middle. I think I am probably lucky to be alive. Because when you jump in the middle of a fight, people will tell you not to as you could get killed, I mean, I think I heard that from someone. The nuns at school they say "Jump in the middle and try and stop it." Yeah, right! I don't think children should jump in the middle of a fight [laughs]. Ah, it is a dangerous thing to do. It's very dangerous. I didn't realise, you know, I just wanted it to stop, and I did that that day and— [trails off].

Sarah stopped the violence against her mother, but she didn't stop it completely. The choice to directly intervene is fraught with danger. Sarah does not say how she was injured, only that she is lucky to be alive. There are many ways in which Sarah could have been injured as a result of "*jumping in the middle*". For example, children who intervene to stop intimate partner violence are at risk of harm by being used as hostages (Flood & Fergus, 2008; McGee, 2000) or shields against violence (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, 2012). Alternatively, children are directly targeted by perpetrators because they intervene to stop the violence (McGee, 2000; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Mullender et al., 2002), or because they defend a parent (Humphreys, Houghton, & Ellis, 2008). It is also possible that Sarah was hurt as a result of being knocked or hit unintentionally, or being hit by falling or thrown objects (McGee, 2000; Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, 2012). Whatever Sarah experienced, it was enough to convince her not to try to intervene again.

For some participants, the decision to intervene to stop violence was an automatic response prompted by fear for the safety of mothers and others. Rachael describes intervening in the violence as an automatic response, stating that she "*never thought about that consciously at the time*":

I don't think there was any thought process behind it at that stage, though. I mean, you can't watch a pregnant woman, like a pregnant woman lying on the ground being kicked and beaten. […] I don't think

> *any decent person can stand back and watch that happening, because*
> *that is two people at risk, and that is a tiny baby at risk.*

Rachael was prompted into action by her father's life-threatening acts of violence. However, some participants described occasions in which their assessments of the likelihood of violence prompted them to engage in early intervention to protect their mothers:

> *"He's coming," you know, "What are we going to do?" He's drunk and*
> *I said. "He's not coming in the front door." He didn't come to the front*
> *door, he was coming up the driveway and around the back, and, um. I*
> *said, "Right we gonna get this frypan and we are gonna hit him on the*
> *head and knock him out, because he will hurt mum," you know. We*
> *knew, and I dunno where mum was, I think she was in the front room.*
> *And, yeah, we were making a plan, and I was the instigator. Yeah, and*
> *I said, "Righty-ho, you two stand behind me and I'll stand on the chair."*
> *So, and, I don't know how I did it, but I remember that he came in the*
> *back door, and he was, he pushed the back door open because it was*
> *locked. It was a flimsy bit of old Baltic pine back door, and he came*
> *round, and he was furious, and I hit him as hard as I could on the head*
> *and it, you know, it staggered him, and he took off after that. (Liz)*

These accounts suggest that children who live with violent perpetrators encounter situations where they make split second assessments of risk and, based on these risk assessments, they sometimes physically intercept dangerous situations to stop fathers from harming family members. Physically intervening, as with nearly all the oppositional strategies used by participants, was intended to put an end to the violence rather than to cause actual harm to their father.

6.2   CONCLUSION

The results reported in this chapter challenge the notion that children are passive victims of domestic abuse, and instead show that participants were actively and relationally engaged in different ways to resist the perpetration of domestic abuse. These findings, in conjunction with the previous two findings chapters, support my

argument that children are actively engaged in negotiating, assessing and responding to domestic abuse as an ongoing and complex phenomenon that affects their lives on a daily basis. However, in addition to these findings, my study has also revealed specific patterns in how survivors respond. The next and final findings chapter presents how turning points, along with social locations and systems of oppression, influence experiences and responses to childhood domestic abuse.

Chapter 7. Constraining and Enabling Factors

Collectively, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present how survivors experienced and responded to childhood domestic abuse. These results emerged from the thematic analysis of participants' narratives. In this final findings chapter, I present results that emerged from the structural analysis of the narratives. As I explained in Chapter 3, I aimed to drill down into factors that constrained and enabled experiences and responses to childhood domestic abuse. By reading down each individual narrative and applying the process of structural analysis, I revealed that the narratives progressed along a similar trajectory. The narratives indicate that participants moved from using primarily protective strategies in the early stages of experiencing domestic abuse to more oppositional strategies of resistance during the latter stages.

In this chapter, I highlight connections between the use of protective and oppositional strategies of resistance by highlighting 'turning points' in the participants' narratives. This analysis of turning points indicates a shift in how childhood domestic abuse is understood and responded to by survivors. I then turn to an examination of accounts that show how, despite ongoing commitments to resist the abuse perpetrated against them and their families, participants' agency is significantly enabled and constrained by intersections of age, race and class. The final section explores the turning points that precipitated a shift in how participants understood their experiences of domestic abuse, and how these understandings informed their responses.

7.1   TURNING POINTS

In narrative analysis, complicating actions that signpost a change in direction are referred to as 'epiphanies' or 'turning points' (Kim, 2015). This section explores the most commonly reported complicating actions that contributes to a shift in how participants made sense of, and responded to, childhood domestic abuse.

The narratives of childhood domestic abuse in the present study contain events or occurrences that signalled a shift in how participants understood their experiences of domestic abuse. Often, in the early stages of narratives, participants describe experiencing domestic abuse as inevitable violence and control associated with the role of fathers. However, as the narratives progress, later experiences of abuse are more often understood and responded to as violations specifically perpetrated by their father figures. Anna provides an example of how she understood her early experiences of domestic abuse as a normal part of family life:

> *It was home, and what else did I know? You know what I mean? What was the alternative? Really there wasn't a viable alternative. And I don't think that I ever even considered that there might be.*

Anna's remarks highlight how, in the absence of an alternative reference point, it is difficult for children to conceive that the violence, abuse and control perpetrated by fathers is not a normal part of everyday life. Anna did not consider that an alternative model of fathering could exist, because she only had her own experiences to draw on.

The participants' accounts suggest that when they viewed domestic abuse through the lens of 'normal' family dynamics, they engaged in protective responses to survive it:

> *You just do whatever you have to do; you go into survival mode. You don't question; you don't think about it or question any of it when you are in there. It is only when you are outside of it and you look back that you think that wasn't normal, or how did I do that? How the hell did we manage that? You don't think like that when you are in it, if that is all you have known. Your perception of what's normal is so different from other people's. (Rachael)*

Rachael's reference to being "*outside of it*" highlights the extent to which children are relationally and contextually embedded in pervasive and ongoing contexts of abuse. However, as opportunities presented themselves that provided Rachael with alternative understandings of what families could be, questions arose for her about what is normal and what is not. These experiences formulate complicating actions and serve as turning points in narratives that signal a shift in how survivors understand and respond to abuse.

The participants' narratives revealed a variety of complicating actions. However, the complicating actions most commonly reported involved one of two experiences: spending time in non-abusive homes, or the influence of one significant person.

7.1.1 Experiencing Non-Abusive Family Life

The most common experience to evoke a questioning of abusive fathers' behaviour involved survivors observing the operations of other families living free from violence. Chris, who went to live with a rural couple when he was in Year 2 of primary school (aged 7), describes the routine and predictability of this foster family, and the everyday feeling of 'lightness' he experienced in the absence of threat:

> *Oh, it was— Oh, they had a farm with a Fergy [Ferguson Tractor], and it was a proper farm, and he would go out every day, Mr Flowers. And he would work until dark, and he had peas, and sheep and pigs, and all sorts of crops, and he would come in at night and have his tea, and every day it would be ditto, he'd be out there doing stuff, and he had a dairy as well. These were good people. They were good people. Um, it was, it was, it was just every day was light. There were no threats, nothing. It was brilliant.*

Chris uses the word "*ditto*" to indicate the routine and predictability of everyday life with this family. The combined experience of knowing what to expect and the absence of intimidation created an alternative experience of family life for Chris, in which the oppressive forces of domestic abuse he had grown accustomed to were undetectable.

Experiences with other families also contradicted how participants understood gendered control. For example, Georgie, who grew up in a very wealthy home with a father who was extremely financially controlling, recalls a sense of disbelief when she went supermarket shopping with her friend's mother:

> *I couldn't believe it when, um, you know, going to the supermarket with my friend's mum, and she'd let us buy lollies, or get us ice cream or whatever. And I mean, occasionally, I would get those treats from my mum, but I would be getting the cheapest thing that mum could possibly get for me; so that when mum had to tell dad about it, it wouldn't be something that was costly. So it was probably going to be a small thing,*

> *so it wasn't going to be something that was going to add to my already*
> *obese nature. [Laughs] Like, so it was just kind of going anywhere with*
> *other people's parents, this whole other world of [pause] craziness.*

The freedom that Georgie's friend's mother had to spend money without fear of retribution for doing so seemed otherworldly to Georgie. Such experiences of freedom in families revealed possibilities for children to start to question how and why their lives could be so different. These accounts concur with Noble-Carr et al.'s (2017) claim that children develop a sophisticated understanding of childhood domestic abuse through a growing awareness of their fathers as violent and their actions as impactful on family members.

While the participants recognised that things that happened in their own families did not necessarily occur in other families, they also acknowledged that other families experienced things that were missing from their own family life. It was through these experiences that some participants started to become aware of their emotional neglect:

> *You were never, you were never told that you were loved, or felt loved,*
> *but 'cause you never got it, you didn't miss it. It wasn't until you got*
> *older that you see how other kids interacted with their parents that you*
> *realised, "Oh, that's what's wrong." So it is not until you get something*
> *that you balance that against. (Michelle)*

Michelle's observation shows how insight into other families provided a counter-narrative to participants' experiences of childhood, showing that parents and children can communicate with and relate to one another in an everyday context free from fear.

Ultimately, what participants experienced when visiting non-abusive homes were families which offered a sense of security and safety where constant vigilance was unnecessary, and where, instead, children were permitted to relax:

> *I loved that home, because I am sure that they had their problems, but*
> *I felt safe there. And it was such a wonderful feeling to feel safe,*
> *whereas I would go into my home and it was the unknown. It's always*
> *that eggshells feeling, there is always that moment of treading carefully*
> *and not ever feeling relaxed enough to just, just blob. (Kelly)*

In the sanctuary of her friend's home, Kelly could feel safe with other people, providing her a brief reprieve from the anxiousness typical of her home. It is in such

experiences that windows of possibility of a world without abuse are opened to children who live in domestically abusive families. However, such windows were not equally available for all the participants.

Some participants encountered a range of intersecting experiences of oppression that made it difficult for them to accurately determine what was different when they entered non-abusive homes. Linda discusses her struggle to put her finger on what the differences were when she spent time at her friend's house:

> *They gave us love. Yeah. They would take us home and give us cake and milk and stuff like that. Mum did what she could, and she made some fantastic meals out of nothing. But it was that belief and knowing that there's a better world out there because of this couple. With the way they brought up their children. [I was] envious. Envious. But it wasn't a— it wasn't, you didn't ever think of envious, you just was, "Oh, I wish I could have that, Oh, I wish I could have that." You know, "I wish we could have cake." A child's world is very shallow really, you know. You know there is something there that is better than what you have got, but it is always to do with cake or piano or, you know, free time, or swim. But you know that it's more than that, it's that underlying safety.*

In this passage, Linda recalls a range of competing experiences when she visited her friend. These different facets included the presence of love, the availability of food, the different way parents and children related, free time and leisure pursuits. It was difficult for Linda, who lived in extreme poverty and violence, to distinguish economic advantage and emotional investment from the underlying experiences of safety. For children who experience many types of disadvantage, it can be more difficult to make sense of experiences of abuse (Noble-Carr et al., 2017).

Experiencing what it was like in other non-abusive homes was not always an option for participants. For some, their fathers' imposition of extreme social isolation prevented them from engaging with other households and experiencing alternative modes of familial engagement. However, participants still found opportunities to speak with at least one significant person from the places in their childhood that they did have access to. The opportunity to have these interactions and conversations also gave rise to complicating actions.

7.1.2 One Significant Person

In the participants' accounts, many complicating actions involved interactions with a significant person who broadened participants' understanding of things such as gender roles, family dynamics, human rights, and experiences of abuse. Teachers, grandparents, friends, neighbours and counsellors were all mentioned as providing a new way of looking at the future and understanding their experiences of abuse. For example, persistent and committed teachers were fundamental to the process of change:

> *I remember I connected with her towards the end of Grade 8, and I felt safe to share with her – not too much. It was like, it was like she knew what was going on at home, but she never pushed me to talk about it. […] And I remember she connected with me, and she had a discussion with me one day, and I remember – I don't remember the exact words – but I remember, um, the discussion that we had. […] She basically told me that if I was going to have a life for myself that it was up to me. That no one else was going to help me. She said to me, "Instead of being angry against everyone and family, channel that anger into getting yourself out of that environment," and she flipped some switch. Yeah, she was a real catalyst to where I was headed, 'cause I was headed down a path that was not ideal. (Indy)*

Indy's complicating action flipped a "*switch*" that provided a vision of a preferred future for her in which she was "*out of that environment*". The formulation of the possibility of alternative futures provides hope for survivors; Kerig (2003) identifies the development of hope as a factor that can lessen the impact of childhood domestic abuse.

Sometimes participants made multiple attempts to find that significant other person who would catalyse change. Rachael encountered several negative experiences with teachers to whom she had disclosed her experiences of sexual abuse and domestic violence. Each of these ineffective exchanges reinforced her sense of powerlessness. However, one teacher provided a very different approach, and was instrumental in helping Rachael break free from her step-father's violence and entrapment:

I am so, so lucky that I had that one teacher who didn't just— other teachers had comforted me when I told them what was happening, but I had that one who was really so active about getting me the hell out of there. Even when my mother took herself off to this woman and told her that I was a lying little bitch and my step-father had never done anything to me and that we were the happiest family on the earth, blah da blah. [This teacher] was the one who made me see that that is not normal, and that is not a normal life, and you don't have to live like that.

For Rachael, the experience of a teacher accepting her mother's account rather than her disclosures of violence and abuse appeared to reinforce the idea that abuse was part of normal life. However, Rachael, in enacting resistance, kept on telling her story until she found someone who could help her see a way out of the abuse. It is not uncommon for children's disclosures of abuse to be ignored or misrepresented by adults (Georgsson Staf & Almqvist, 2015; Goddard, 2009). However, Rachael's persistence served as a complicating action that reinforced her underlying suspicion of injustice and led to her relocating to a safe home.

Complicating actions served as a pivotal point at which survivors shifted from understanding abuse as an inevitable though unwanted part of everyday family life to viewing it as a violation of rights:

I mean probably I couldn't have labelled it as a domestic violence cycle, but I was very much aware that this is how it works, and very angry. I have a very big part of me that is about justice, and I think it came from that time of realising "this is not just, this is not right, you don't get to get away with this every day!" It's like a criminal who never gets caught and never gets called to account. You're just allowed to be a criminal, over and over and over, and that's not okay. (Cat)

These moments in the narratives suggest the development of a critical consciousness of abuse as an injustice rather than a patriarchal right. In referencing realisation of Cat's father's abuse and control as a violation of rights and an issue of injustice, Cat shows how she established a new meaning for her father's actions as something he was individually responsible for, and something criminal. Turning points appeared to help

participants develop new ways of understanding and responding to violence and abuse, and to find new possibilities for the future.

7.2   CONSTRUCTING PREFERRED FUTURES

The narratives in this study show that complicating actions were a catalyst for participants to construct ideas about their future lives as places free from violence and abuse:

> *I had made a personal promise to myself, and it was during that time when that teacher was talking to me. […] I remember thinking, at the same time, I am never going to have that life for myself, I will never put myself in that environment. (Indy)*

The complicating action Indy experienced prompted her to envisage a future in which she had a different life for herself.

Participants' commitment to break the cycle of family dysfunction and violence they experienced as children was a strong theme of their accounts. Some participants expressed a determination to have lives different from their mothers':

> *That was one thing I remember: I never wanted to be like my mother. It would have been in my teenage years, because I could see how she, how much of a doormat she was. And that's what, that is where the feminist bit comes in; no man was going to treat me like dad treated her. (Ellen)*

In her teenage years, Ellen made a commitment to guard against the possibility that she would be used in an unappreciative and expectation-laden way by men. In addition to not reproducing the lives of their mothers, participants were also cognisant of not emulating the behaviour modelled by fathers:

> *Something in him made me promise to myself that I never wanted to be that angry. I never wanted to have that temper. And I have some of it, I do. Um, and I don't like it in myself, but I recognise that it is there. However, I, I think the difference between us as parents is my kids know I love them, even when I am angry with them or they are angry with me, my kids know I love them. And, and I am always there for them, when*

> *the shitty stuff happens, when the good stuff happens, I am always there.*
> *(Anna)*

Anna recognises that she has the potential to be angry, like her father, but at the same time she highlights how this potential does not stop her from expressing love. Here Anna alludes to the differences between being angry and being abusive; anger is a natural and valid emotion that can exist in healthy family relationships. Anna discusses anger as something that each of her family members has the right to experience and express. This way of being contrasts sharply with Anna's experiences of her father's anger as enmeshed with intimidation to impose control.

When constructing new and preferred futures, many of the participants discussed how they formulated specific commitments to parenting in very different ways from those they had experienced as children:

> *I think that, though, there is one thing, though I would be surprised if it*
> *wasn't common in most people who had been through, um, abuse in*
> *their childhoods, is this determination that it would be different when*
> *you're a parent. […] So there is the determination, and the equally*
> *horrible realisation that it doesn't just happen like that. That you have*
> *to make a conscious choice if you don't want to parent that way. (Kelly)*

All of the participants expressed a determination not to repeat the abusive patterns present in their childhoods. These statements are congruent with previous studies, which have shown that resolutions to secure lives that were free from hatred or malice began to develop in childhood as survivors of childhood domestic abuse gained insight into the possibility that alternative pathways existed (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hague et al., 2012; O'Brien et al., 2013). Such findings showcase the role of complicating actions in building resilience to childhood domestic abuse and resistance to the reproduction of violence intergenerationally.

As discussed earlier in this section, however, access to some complicating actions are influenced by the types of control and abuse that children experience. For example, children who experience extreme social isolation have fewer opportunities to engage with individuals outside their immediate families, which reduces the chances for complicating actions to occur. While different types and tactics of abuse can constrain or enable children's access to support, other factors such as social location

and intersecting systems of oppression can further influence children's ability to enact agency and resistance. The next section examines how the social locations of age, race and class further affect experiences of childhood domestic abuse.

7.3   INTERSECTIONALITY OF AGE, CLASS AND RACE

People experience domestic abuse in various ways, and according to the varying social roles, rules, power and privilege afforded by their social location, as defined by their gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation and geographic location (Etherington & Baker, 2016). For children, the social location of age, through the assignment to the group of 'child', creates some unifying barriers for responding to domestic abuse. However, other systems of oppression, such as class and race, also intersect to diversify children's experience and responses to gendered abuse. The following sections explore these intersecting factors and show how agency is enabled and constrained in unique ways depending on participants' social locations and their experiences of systems of oppression.

7.3.1 Social Location of Age

Children's experiences of domestic abuse differ from adults' because they are situated in systems of power based on age. An outcome of occupying this social location is that children are positioned hierarchically in society based on their assignment to the social category of 'child'. Hierarchical power relations between adults and children constrain young people's access to support and assistance. A strong feature of each of the narratives analysed in this study was that children who experience abuse are dependent on adults to effect change. Despite this dependency, participants outlined numerous occasions in which their attempts to access support and help from adults elicited inadequate or ineffective responses. For example, Rachael recalls her biological father's inaction after phoning him for help when she feared for her life:

> *I rang our father that night, and I said, "Come and get us, because he [Rachael's mother's partner] is going to end up killing us," and he said that he couldn't interfere because it was our mother's choice.*

Rachael reached out to one of the three adults who held responsibility for protecting her and keeping her safe. However, her father sidelined her pleas by deferring the responsibility to her mother. This exchange demonstrates how children who experience domestic abuse are constrained by a welfare discourse that positions them as objects of adult care, protection and control (Eriksson, 2012).

In addition to being disregarded and silenced, adults were able to subvert children's disclosures with an alternative version of the truth:

> *We did feel like we had to look after ourselves. And then if we said anything, like there were different adults in our life that we did tell, but then of course they go and speak to your mother about it, and she says, "Oh no that is not happening. I've got this black eye because I walked into a door. I've got stitches in my forehead because I am clumsy." (Rachael)*

Rachael's narrative reveals that she made several disclosures about her mother's abuse, her abuse, her brother's abuse, and the sexual abuse perpetrated against her by her step-father, but that nearly all of these disclosures elicited inadequate responses from adults. The silencing and inaction that Rachael experienced as a child resonates strongly through her narrative, and is something to which Rachael attributes her brother's death by suicide.

Other participants discussed occasions where they had reached out to emergency services and found that their accounts were not taken seriously because of their status as children:

> *Yeah, another time he smacked her arm, here, around here because it snapped a nerve and snapped the arm here. I raced over to phone the ambulance. The ambulance came with the police, and the police were swearing at him. Got her into the ambulance, and the police are saying, "What the 'F' happened here? What the 'F' happened here?" That's what they were saying, but could not touch him. They knew exactly what happened because they were fighting. [...] I was there, they were fighting, and he just put her arm around and twisted, and I heard it. And I had to race across there— But he said, [in gruff voice] "None of your F'ing business, now get her in the ambulance," and there were two*

> *police that could do nothing! He was blind drunk. […] Put her in the*
> *ambulance. He went back upstairs, they left, and I just stood there, and*
> *I thought, "No, well if they can't help, no one can help. No one can*
> *help." (Linda)*

When the emergency services arrived, Linda was positioned as a bystander rather than a social actor and citizen with involvement in the event. Consequently, Linda stood and watched the exchange between the emergency services and her father. All the while, the truth of what she saw silently screamed out in Linda's mind. Linda had the answers to the officer's questions, but was rendered invisible because of her status as a child. Instead, Linda's father was the only person to be given the opportunity to explain how the injury to her mother occurred. Adults' ability to override the accounts of children's experiences are identified in the literature as a form of age inequality where adults are given more credibility than children solely because of the status conferred for being older (Young Bruehl, 2012).

In addition to directly being silenced by adults, the participants in this study recalled self-censoring due to the fear of being removed from their homes by statutory services:

> *When [the police] left, my mum said to me, "If you ever, ever report*
> *that again you will be taken away, and you will be put into foster care.*
> *You will be taken away from me, and God knows where you will end*
> *up." So I never, ever report it again. So that shut my voice down, I*
> *never, ever reported that again to the police. I was scared to tell anyone*
> *at school. (Indy)*

In this story, Indy had called the police because her step-father was physically assaulting her mother. After the police left, Indy was instructed by her adult parents, who are entrusted with her care, not to speak out again for fear that other adults will come and remove her. The threat of adults being able to take Indy into care was frightening enough for her to never speak out about the abuse to the police again.

The impacts of age inequality compound children's experiences of domestic abuse by removing some avenues for assistance through implicit processes that render children invisible, silent and unimportant. For some participants, though, the intersecting social locations of age and class also influenced the limiting effects of age inequality, and this is discussed in the next section.

7.3.2 Age and Class

For some participants, class-related social location created a buffer against the effects of domestic abuse. For example, Georgie described how she was able to engage in the wider world through her pursuit of equestrian sports. These pursuits allowed Georgie to get away with her mother, and for them both to briefly escape the gaze of her father:

> *I know that I am really lucky to have had horses and to have had that situation but tied in with a father who could afford for me to ride. 'Cause I think any hobby or any, anything, any sport, whatever they'd got me involved in would have probably been enough to pull me through, but the fact that I always liked horses and annoyed them until they got me one. Oh, it was the best set up, because it meant that I could physically ride away […] um, and then, of course, there was pony club. There were camps, competitions that mum was going to take me to. So, then mum and I had this, this thing that we could do together. We could be gone for, you know, a whole weekend, not being home, not seeing dad.*

Cat also describes how throwing herself into scholastic pursuits and extra-curricular activities provided a buffer against what was occurring at home:

> *I was happy at school, and I had good friends. I got involved in things. I got involved in the film committee and different things like that. So, I was, I was, I felt good there. And I think that when you have something in your world that is good and where you feel comfortable, and you're, you're kind of thriving in that environment, it provides some balance to all that stuff.*

The examples provided by Georgie and Cat show how, despite living with domestic abuse, children can engage in activities that provide opportunities to thrive and experience success. Such opportunities can provide a buffering effect against childhood domestic abuse by allowing children to make positive affirmations of themselves through other pursuits and engagements with peers (Kerig, 2003).

Not all children were able to benefit from the buffering effects of engagement in activities outside the family:

> *I never went to one of the school socials. You knew not to ask. It might be in a notice when you give your parents the newsletter, and mum, the newsletter saying that the social is on at this time, but you knew that you weren't going. Because you didn't have clothes for a start. It might have been you had to take a packet of chips or a drink to share; or Ted [Michelle's Step-father] would have been drunk; or there wouldn't be enough petrol; or yeah. You just knew you couldn't do it. (Michelle)*

For Michelle, socioeconomic status significantly affected her experience of childhood domestic abuse. Buffers that mediate the impact of abuse, such as those described above by Cat and Georgie, were not an option for Michelle because of her impoverished circumstances.

While Michelle was unable to engage in activities outside the home that incurred a cost, she was able to access social support in her neighbourhood, and drew on this resource to keep her safe when she suspected that her father's abuse might be about to escalate:

> *I had a friend that lived three doors down the road, and quite often I would go to her house and I would ask my mum if I could go stay at Stacy's [pseudonym used], and I'd go stay there when I knew there was going to be something going on. But you couldn't avoid it all the time, of course.*

Here, Michelle describes drawing on the resources at her disposal to lessen the impacts of her experiences of living with domestic abuse. Going to Stacy's house provided safety and support for Michelle in times of danger, A place that could be accessed for refuge when needed. For Sarah, though, as an Aboriginal child, such support was

unavailable to her due to her experiences of the intersecting systems of age inequality, classism and racism.

7.3.3 Age, Class and Race

Sarah's lived experience as a young Aboriginal girl living in extreme poverty in a domestically abusive home stands in contrast to those of other survivors from more privileged backgrounds. Most of the participants who contributed to this study, who had not experienced racial oppression or poverty, discuss reprieves from living with domestic abuse not possible for other participants. For Sarah, intersections of race and class compounded her experiences of isolation, and reduced her opportunities to engage with others:

> *We never went to anybody else's house. We weren't allowed to.*
> *Alternatively, we were just too poor or we were never invited. Actually,*
> *the fact that we were coloured I suspect made it very difficult for us,*
> *because racism was a very big deal in our town.*

In this passage, Sarah clearly describes the intersection of racism, classism and adultism, and how these systems of oppression influenced her experience of childhood domestic abuse. Sarah's statement that she was not "*allowed*" to go to the homes of others suggests that, as a child, these choices were made by her adult guardians. However, Sarah also reflects on the possibility that her family may have been excluded by other families on the basis of class. After giving the matter further consideration, Sarah suggests that her exclusion and isolation may have been related to her social location as an Indigenous person. It is more likely that, rather than being only one of these reasons, Sarah's experiences of isolation were influenced by each of these systems of oppression.

Experiences of racism intersected with age inequality to further compound some survivors' experience of domestic abuse. Here, Sarah discusses her experiences of systems of adultism and racism:

> *I recognised it as a child because you would hear kids saying— they*
> *would call you "blackie", and, you know, the nuns did the same thing.*
> *They were cruel and racist. They were shocking. And, um, you know, as*
> *I went through life, I recognised it more and more as I got older, to the*

point where I just thought we just don't belong in that world, the white

world. We just don't! (Sarah)

In addition to experiencing childhood domestic abuse and sexual abuse in her family, Sarah experienced discrimination as a child through the hierarchical power relationships with the nuns who were assigned authority over Sarah and through racism based on her Aboriginality. Each of these experiences of oppression intersected to reinforce Sarah's sense of otherness, and informed a sense of worthlessness based on her position as a child and as someone who is not white.

While other survivors who contributed to this study identified a significant person who helped them make meaning of their experiences as a turning point, such as teachers, counsellors or grandparents, Sarah's cultural history of colonisation constrained these options by limiting the availability of people for her to confide in:

I definitely think it was cultural history. I believe once, um, back then,

I can say this, back then racism was huge. It really was, and I think

everyone, including the police, were against black people. I think that

is just the way it was, um, you know, coloured people weren't tolerated.

They just weren't, and they didn't care about them, and the police

treated them very unfairly. I saw it when they came to our house and

they came next door, and I know that they had no tolerance of us, that

they were racist, and I know a lot of people were. I mean, heck, the nuns

at the school were. Um, and most of the kids at the school, as well. I

never had a friend at school till Grade 7, because— I was always the

little black kid. So yes, it was very much a part of life when I grew up.

We had more than our fair share to contend with.

In other narratives, police, teachers, friends and the families of friends are referred to as resources whom participants accessed or contemplated accessing for support and assistance when living with domestic abuse. As exemplified in the above section, often these attempts to access assistance are constrained by children's assignment to the social category of the child. For Sarah, however, these avenues of support were less available, because systems of racism intersected with age inequality to compound her experience of childhood domestic abuse. In light of this, Sarah was one of the few participants who never sought assistance for the abuse she experienced at home from any other adults during her childhood.

One of the key fears that stopped Sarah from disclosing her experience of childhood domestic abuse or the sexual abuse she experienced to anyone was her fear of being forcibly removed from her home:

I would not have wanted to have left home. I had all my siblings, you know, we were isolated from the world anyway, and as bad as home life was, when I did go out into that wide world as a child, it wasn't much different to home life.

In these comments, Sarah shows how her family, although a place of extreme, violent abuse, was also a place of security compared to the wider world, where other forms of institutional discrimination and oppression were routinely experienced. Constrained by social locations of age, class and race, Sarah was the only survivor who contributed to this study who did not encounter a complicating action during her childhood. It was not until after Sarah married and moved away from the abuse and poverty in her home that she began to understand that domestic abuse is not an intrinsic part of family life. Sarah's experience resonates with Crenshaw's (1993) claims that adult black female survivors' experiences of intimate partner violence are compounded by race and class differences.

7.4   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined how social locations of age, gender, class and race intersect and influence children's experiences and responses to domestic abuse. Varying systems of oppression created situations in which participant survivors experienced childhood domestic abuse in diverse ways. Children's ability to enact agency and resistance is both enabled and constrained by these intersecting factors. In the next chapter, I explore these findings in relation to the previous literature on children and domestic abuse, and argue that, rather than passive victims of domestic abuse, children are active agents, operating in varying systems of oppression to resist the perpetration of abuse.

Chapter 8.   Discussion

To holistically understand experiences of childhood domestic abuse, it is critical to recognise that children are people living and interacting within an everyday context of oppression. In this chapter, I make the case that children who live with domestic abuse are active social agents who respond in creative ways when living in an ongoing and pervasive context of gendered violence. This underpinning argument challenges the idea that children who live with domestic abuse are collaterally damaged as a result of their experiences of witnessing sporadic occasions of physical abuse between their parental caregivers. Instead, I use my findings to propose that children are active social agents who work creatively and innovatively to resist the perpetration of domestic abuse by fathers while negotiating a range of intersecting social structures and systems of oppression.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, '*children's experiences of domestic abuse*', discusses the nuanced ways in which children experience living with domestic abuse as an everyday part of childhood. I explore the findings from the present study in the context of previous research and models to show how children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse are similar to those of adult survivors of intimate partner violence. Notwithstanding these similarities, this section also explores how children experience domestic abuse differently from adults as a result of their child status in a world that is inherently adult-focused. In concluding this first section, I analyse further to understand how children's experiences of domestic abuse, even within the unifying category of childhood, are uniquely affected by varying social locations and their individual experiences of navigating the intersectionality of multiple systems of oppression.

The second section of this chapter discusses children's responses to domestic abuse. I draw on an understanding of childhood domestic abuse as an ongoing and pervasive context of power and control to demonstrate how children's responses to domestic abuse are informed across time and through experience. It is argued that children draw on all their available resources to actively respond to and resist the perpetration of domestic abuse. Prochaska, Redding and Evers' (2002) transtheoretical

model of change is used to make sense of how children's understanding of domestic abuse influence their responses to the creation and maintenance of oppressive environments by perpetrators.

8.1 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

A key aim of this study was to gain insight into how adult survivors of childhood domestic abuse narrate their childhood experiences. I now discuss how the participants who contributed to this study described their experiences as an ongoing context of abuse in which power and control infuses every aspect of their daily lives. In situating the findings from this study alongside the existing literature, children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse are conceptualised as both a shared experience amongst children, as well as a heterogeneous experience unique to the position of children. I make the case that children experience domestic abuse every day, and that, through experiences that are bound by the commonalities of the shared experience of domestic abuse and the social status of being a child. At the same time, however, the heterogeneous nature of childhood domestic abuse means that joint experiential accounts are also divided by intersecting systems of oppression.

8.1.1 A Pervasive and Ongoing Context of Abuse and Control

The accounts presented in this study show that children experience domestic abuse in similar ways to those described by female survivors of intimate partner violence. Overwhelmingly, the narratives presented in the previous four findings chapters suggest that children experience domestic abuse as an inescapable and enduring context of abuse and control. This finding is congruent with a recent meta-synthesis of 40 qualitative studies that found a unifying theme in children's identification of their experiences of domestic abuse as "relentless and enduring" (Noble-Carr, Moore & McArthur, 2019). Despite such findings, it is rare to find definitions of childhood domestic abuse that include the operation of coercive control (Callaghan et al., 2015; Haselschwerdt, 2019; Katz, 2016; Stark, 2017). Instead, most of the research on childhood domestic abuse positions children as witnesses to adult intimate partner violence rather than central figures experiencing childhood domestic

abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Noble-Carr et al., 2017). For example, prevalence data describing childhood domestic abuse are based on quantitative studies detailing how many children have witnessed physical abuse (Indermaur, 2001). Moreover, much of the research from the area of developmental psychology focuses on how incidents of physical abuse damage children's emotional, cognitive and neurological development. Even more recently child-centred qualitative studies have been limited to children's experiences of physical violence (DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011; Noble-Carr et al., 2017; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). In a break from this approach, I argue that children's experiences of domestic abuse are much broader than their encounters with incidents of violence, and that many of the aspects of domestic abuse described by adult survivors also occur in childhood domestic abuse.

This study shows that participants' experiences of childhood domestic abuse align with research detailing women's accounts of living with intimate partner violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, 2004; Hayes, 2013; Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). A strong evidence base shows that women experience domestic violence as an ongoing pattern of behaviour inclusive of a range of criminal and non-criminal tactics used by perpetrators to exercise power and control over family members (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 2011; Morris, 2009; Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2012a). Mirroring these reports, the participants in my research also described everyday experiences of living with entrenched patterns of abuse. At times, the participants, while focussing on stories about sexual and physical abuses, often unintentionally provided in-depth descriptions of being socially isolated, economically deprived and emotionally abused. As such, participants identified what Dobash and Dobash (2004 p. 334) term "a constellation of abuses", including acts that are not physical but are used by perpetrators to intimidate, frighten or coerce victims. Such findings are critical because they suggest that previous definitions of childhood domestic abuse that focus on incidents or acts that children witness are too narrow to encapsulate children's holistic experience of living with domestically abusive fathers.

In addition to describing childhood domestic abuse as a constellation of abuses, participants also described living in a broad and continuing context in which a range of abuses intertwined to produce an environment of constant trepidation and fear. The effects of these tactics of abuse reached beyond the bounds of the home by following participants into every aspect of their lives, taking the form of worries, fears, and the

need to be constantly alert and prepared. Certainly, the narratives did contain many stories about physical and sexual abuse, though more often participants' accounts portrayed the omnipresence of threat, instilled by their ongoing experiences of non-physical tactics of coercive control and other non-physical violence. Such accounts demonstrate that childhood domestic abuse is a pervasive and ongoing experience that is not limited to sporadic and episodic incidents of violence.

The patterns of abuse identified by participants in this research strongly resonate with the types of abuses that adult women report when discussing their survival of intimate partner violence (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). Despite evidence showing that many women experience physical violence on a weekly (Klaus & Rand, 1984) or daily basis (Brookoff, O'Brien, Cook, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), it is noteworthy that physical abuse is not always what women identify as underpinning the ongoing nature of their domestic abuse (Stark, 2007). Instead, research from shelter surveys has shown that women more often attribute the continuous nature of domestic abuse to combined acts of non-physical abuse that come together with the threat of violence to create a 'campaign of terror' (Hayes, 2013). The narratives in this study suggest that, like adults, children experience domestic abuse as a milieu of threat, surveillance and degradation that creates an ongoing atmosphere of control through intimidation. Given the similarities between women's experiences of intimate partner violence and children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse, it is worthwhile to consider the accounts presented in this study against existing models used to make sense of adults' experiences of domestic violence.

Evidence-based and research-informed models of adult domestic abuse now tend to include power and control as central aims of domestically abusive perpetrators. For example, Stark (2007) proposes a model that outlines tactics of coercive control used by men to achieve dominance over women. Such techniques of coercive control include the use of violence, intimidation, isolation and control, which comprise of tactics such as degradation, surveillance, micromanagement, threats, stalking, shaming, and using child abuse as tangential spouse abuse (Stark 2007). These less visible dimensions of abuse and violence are known to entrap women and erode their sense of self.

While Stark's model is specific to women's experiences of gendered abuse, it makes little reference to the involvement of children. Children only really feature in

this model as instruments used by perpetrators to inflict further abuse on women and, as such, children are constructed as passive weapons used by perpetrators. Including children in the model is an important step forward in recognising them as integrally and relationally embedded in contexts of domestic abuse. At the same time, however, including children in the model in this way is of limited usefulness for social workers and other health care professionals in their work to understand and support children involved in domestically abusive situations. Thus, there is a need for established and informed models of childhood domestic abuse that incorporate coercive control directly into children's experiences of living with domestically abusive parental figures. One model that has come close to doing this is the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, developed in 1984 by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota.

Like Stark's theory of coercive control, the Duluth Power and Control Model (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 2017) is informed by the experiences of women who live with violent and controlling men (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Pitman, 2010). Given the similarities that have come to light between women's and children's experiences of domestic abuse through the present research, the Duluth Model of Power and Control serves as a useful starting point for the development of a model of children's experiences of domestic abuse. One of the most often used models of domestic abuse, it explains how tactics of coercive control are reinforced by the threat of physical and sexual violence by men to maintain power and control over women (Hayes, 2013; Pitman, 2010; Stark, 2007, 2009a). The Duluth model is depicted as a wheel (see Figure 3, below). The diagram shows an outer ring representing how sexual and physical violence encompass and reinforce a range of tactics of abuse. These tactics are diagrammatically represented by spokes, and encompass the central component of power and control. The tactics of abuse depicted in the Duluth Power and Control Model show the types of behaviour men use to create a pattern of coercive control. The outer ring shows how physical and sexual violence constrain women's options to resist the tactics of control, and the inner circle of power and control indicates the outcome that men who perpetrate domestic abuse desire. The tactics used by men to subjugate and dominate women outlined in the wheel are very similar to those identified by the participants in this research. However, it is apparent that recognising children's experiences of domestic abuse as part of an abusive household

gender regime requires more effort than simply applying previous models of adults' experiences of domestic abuse to those of children.
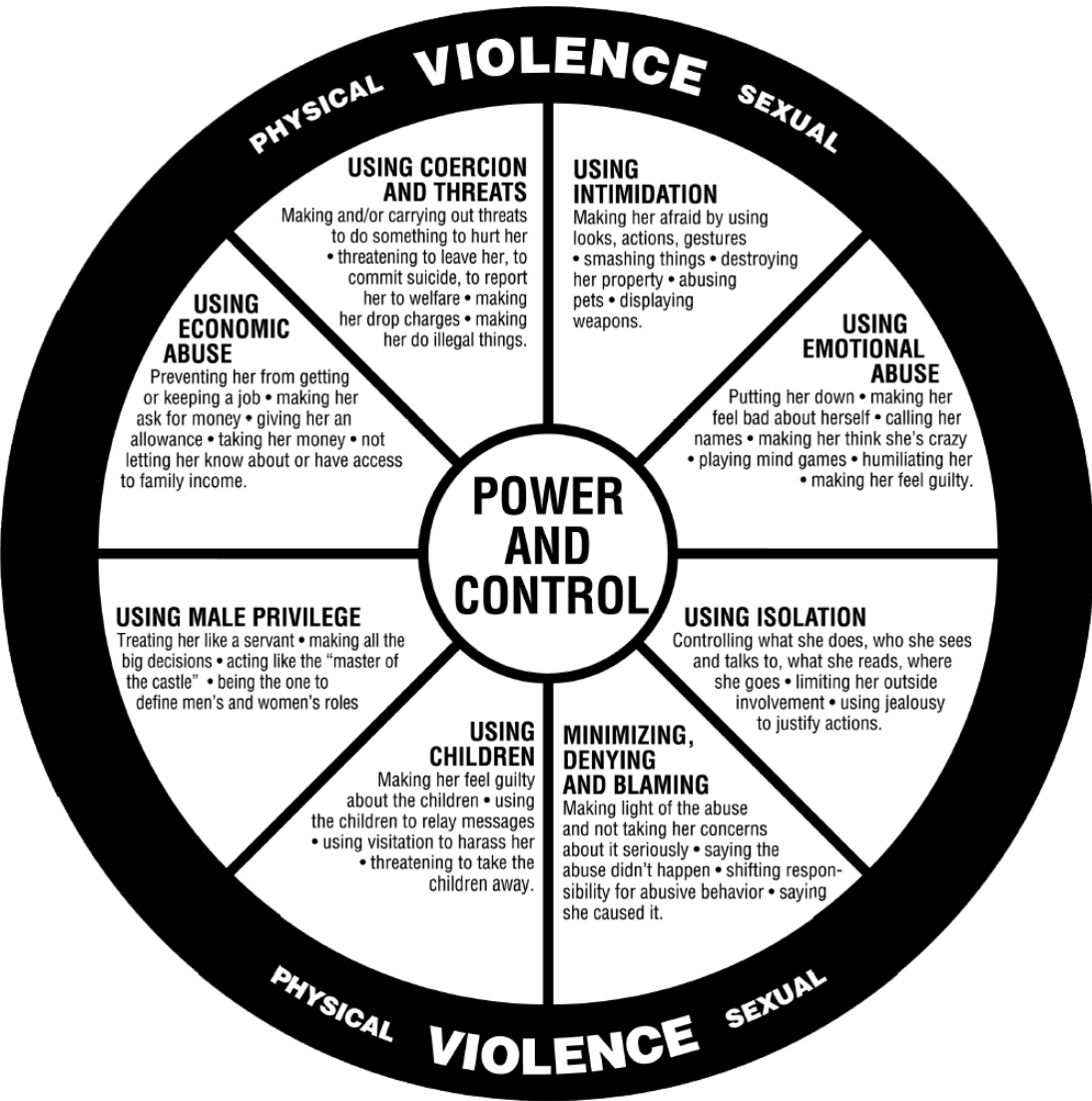

Figure 3. Duluth Model of Power and Control

Systemic reforms to create the conditions for children who experience domestic abuse to access useful support rely on effective models and frameworks. These models are also critical to the effective response of policymakers and support professionals It is, therefore, time to either reformulate the existing models or develop new models informed by survivors of childhood domestic abuse. Existing models of coercive control provide a solid first step, but they are not one-size-fits-all, and cannot be automatically applied to the experiences of children. While children experience similar tactics of abuse to adults who live with intimate partner violence, their social positioning ensures that their experiences are also markedly different from adults'. Damant et al. (2008) argue that in emphasising the commonalities of experiences of

domestic abuse it is critical that the differences between groups are not inadvertently ignored or denied. In light of this critical consideration, the next sub-section examines how the social location of age creates some experiences which only children share and which differentiate children's experiences of domestic abuse from adult survivors'.

8.1.2 Children's Shared Experiences of Domestic Abuse

Childhood domestic abuse is an intersectional issue, shaped by inequalities of age, kinship and gender (Eriksson, 2012). As argued above, childhood domestic abuse includes many of the same tactics of abuse that adult victims of intimate partner violence also experience, but it would be inaccurate to assume that children's lived experiences of domestic abuse are identical to those of their adult counterparts. Children, as a group, experience forms of oppression that adults do not (Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016). These differences mean that childhood domestic abuse is a related but different experience to that of intimate partner violence. So, while it is likely that children will experience some of the same tactics of abuse as adults, it is critical to also consider how social locations such as age affect children's lived experiences of abuse, and how this positioning creates a shared experience amongst children (Eriksson, 2012). Using a feminist intersectional approach to examine childhood domestic abuse has revealed how operations of power implicit in the social order of children's lives influence their lived experiences of domestic abuse in specific and unique ways for children as a group (Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016).

The social positioning of children in Australia ties to several social structures. Children simultaneously inhabit positions of gender (son or daughter), age (child rather than adult) and kinship (child rather than parent) (Eriksson, 2012). Each of these social locations consists of different power relationships which both construct and are constructed in relation to each other (Eriksson, 2012). For example, experiences of adultism occurred throughout this study when participants reached out for help from adults who occupied positions of authority and found their pleas minimised, denied or ignored because of their child status. This finding is congruent with research by Peckover and Trotter (2015, pp 401) that found adults often attribute the role of intervening for children in situations of domestic abuse to be 'someone else's job'. In these circumstances, discrimination against children occurred when adults positioned themselves as more competent to make decisions about the children's needs and

experiences than the children themselves (Bell, 1995; Ceaser, 2014; Checkoway, 2017). The accounts in the present study are congruent with reports from social workers operating in the field of child abuse who argue that age inequality, through adults' rights to make decisions for children (Goddard, 2009; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), can often overshadow children's participatory rights as active social citizens (Eriksson, 2012). These findings are critical, because they unmask the intersection of adultism as a system of oppression that confounds children's experiences of domestic abuse.

Inequalities based on age also entwine with kinship as intersecting patterns of domination to influence children's experiences of domestic abuse in unique ways (Eriksson, 2012). The hierarchical structuring of families further constrains children's opportunities to participate (Gordon 2008, Eriksson 2012). The survivors interviewed for this study often described their fathers as occupying the head position in families, followed by mothers, after whom children trailed in order of eldest sibling to youngest. Comments such as "*things had to be his way*" and "*he was in charge*" evidenced that participants understood fathers, as a result of their age and gender, to hold a privileged position of power and control in families. When men can subvert the autonomy and equality of women and children in families, they benefit by increasing their authority in the home (Hayes, 2013). Indeed, it is a common occurrence for generational order to define the status of children in families. However, in this ordering of family, children are considered developing beings in need of adult guidance and protection, rather than active social agents (Christensen & Prout, 2005; Corsaro, 2018; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 2015; Mayall, 2000; Prout & James, 1997). Through this positioning, children are conditioned from a young age to accept that adults naturally control aspects of their lives, such as what they eat, how they dress, what time to sleep, their access to money, and even the conditions under which they may socialise (Bell, 1995). The outcome of this process is that children willingly defer to adult authority (Bell, 1995). Generally, the level of parental control exercised over children in families works to provide safety and support for children (Gordon, 2008). However, this level of dependency on the part of children can be problematic if they are living with abuse (Goddard & Bedi, 2010).

For children who are experiencing domestic abuse, the boundary between legitimate parental control and the enactment of abuse, particularly coercive control,

can sometimes be nebulous (Anderson, 2010). In this research, participants struggled to differentiate tactics of abuse from what they understood to be legitimate acts of parenting. A key example involved one of the participants being repeatedly punched into the walls of a hallway by her step-father, allegedly as 'discipline' for her rebellious behaviour. Participants also understood many other tactics of abuse, such as micro-surveillance, social isolation and economic abuse as falling within a protective parental role. Congruently, Naughton et al. (2019) also found that young people have difficulty recognising psychological tactics of abuse as domestic violence. These findings highlight the difficulty that children have in identifying what constitutes abusive behaviour when all parents can legitimately invoke their right to punish, hit, threaten, or remove 'privileges' as socially acceptable ways of controlling, protecting or disciplining children (Bell, 1995; Goddard & Bedi, 2010). Just as violence against women can hide in plain sight because of a backdrop of gender role expectation (Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2012a), so too can children's experiences of domestic abuse be camouflaged against a backdrop of adult privilege.

While the use of adult privilege rarely features as a tactic of abuse in studies of childhood domestic abuse, this power imbalance does feature in models used to explain children's experience of abuse. For example, the Duluth Model of Abuse of Children (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 2017) includes adult privilege as a tactic of abuse that is reinforced by sexual and physical violence (see Figure 4, below). As an adaptation of the Power and Control Wheel discussed earlier in this section, the Duluth Model of Abuse of Children provides examples of adult privilege being used as a form of child abuse that includes treating children as servants, punishing, bossing, always winning, and interrupting. The model highlights that adult privilege can subvert and subordinate children by using power and control assigned to adults over children. Indeed, many of the participants in this study experienced occasions in which adult privilege was used to silence them and constrain their agency. Another tactic of abuse cited by the Duluth Model of Child Abuse that reinforces the use of adult privilege and silences children is the use of institutions to threaten and coerce children.

Figure 4. Duluth Model of Abuse of Children

The ability of abusive adults to call on the threat of institutions to reinforce their power over children highlights the subordinate position of children in broader social structures. The accounts in this study, as well as previous studies with children who had experienced domestic abuse (Goddard, 2009; McGee, 1997; Mullender et al., 2002), demonstrate that children are often fearful of the power that institutions have to make decisions about their lives. The participants, as children, were very conscious of the power that institutions could wield. The fear of losing further control over their choices to institutions was used to keep participants silent about the violence in their families. The threat of having children removed by child protection agencies is also a tactic that perpetrators use against mothers to ensure control (Laing, 2003). Institutions such as child protective services, schools and juvenile justice systems represent a ubiquitous power over children because of the status of children in society as

dependents in need of guidance and protection (Mayall, 2000). The power of this tactic of control links to the social status of children in society, and to the power that adults can assume to intervene in where and with whom children reside. Consequently, perpetrators can use agencies that exist for the protection of children as a tactic of coercion against children to maintain control.

While the Duluth Model of Child Abuse (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 2017) is useful in highlighting tactics of abuse that are specific to children as a result of their social location, the model does not centre specifically on children's experience of domestic abuse. Other than briefly referring to perpetrators "being violent to another, a parent, pet, etc." as a tactic of intimidation, the model does not seek to depict children's experiences of domestic abuse. As such, while many of the tactics of abuse included in the model are relevant to children, the model is not readily transferable. Instead, integrating tactics of power and control included in the Duluth Model of Power and Control with the Model of Abuse of Children can illustrate children's shared experiences of domestic abuse in a way that aligns with the accounts reported in the present study. Comparing both models reveals overlaps and gaps in each which both enhance and hinder their application to the study of childhood domestic abuse.

Several key differences stand out when comparing the Duluth Power and Control Model with the Abuse of Children Model (see Table 2 below for a comparison). One key difference is the focus on power and control. In the Model of Abuse of Children, different interests between adults and children emerge in which the use of power and control by adults is legitimised by virtue of their social position as adults and parents. For instance, the Power and Control Model specifically includes coercion and threat as a tactic used by domestically abusive men who perpetrate against women. However, in the model of abuse of children, this tactic is reduced to threat only, and the term coercion is completely omitted. Correspondingly, reference to the control of behaviours in the 'isolation' tactic appears in the Power and Control Model but is omitted from the Abuse of Children Model. The absence of any reference to tactics of coercion and control in the model of abuse of children implies that abused children either do not experience these tactics of abuse, or that the line between acts of coercion and control viewed as legitimised adult control over children may be too difficult to discern in a model of abuse. Whatever the reason for the omission of these terms, the

accounts presented in this study indicate that their inclusion is vital for a complete model of childhood domestic abuse.

Table 2. Comparison of Duluth Model of Power and Control and Duluth Model of Abuse of Children

Abuse of Children Model	*Power and Control Model*
Intimidation • Instilling fear through looks, actions, gestures, property destruction • Using adult size • Yelling • Being violent to another parent, pets, etc.	Using Intimidation • Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures • Smashing things • Destroying her property • Abusing pets • Displaying a weapon
Institutions • Threatening punishment with/by God, courts, police, school, juvenile detention, foster homes, relatives, psychiatric wards	
Isolation • Controlling access to peers/adults, siblings, other parent, grandparents	Using Isolation • Controlling what she does, whom she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes • Limiting her outside involvement • Using jealousy to justify actions
Emotional Abuse • Put downs, name calling • Using children as confidants • Using children to get or give information to other parent • Being inconsistent • Shaming children	Using Emotional Abuse • Putting her down • Making her feel bad about herself • Calling her names • Making her think she's crazy • Playing mind games • Humiliating her • Making her feel guilty
Economic Abuse • Withholding basic needs, using money to control behaviour • Squandering family money • Withholding child support • Using children as an economic bargaining chip in divorce	Using Economic Abuse • Preventing her from getting or keeping a job • Making her ask for money • Giving her an allowance • Taking her money • Not letting her know about or have access to family income
Threats • Threatening abandonment, suicide, physical harm, confinement, or harm to other loved ones	Using Coercion and Threats • Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her • Threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare • Making her drop charges • Making her do illegal things
Using Adult Privilege • Treating children as servants • Punishing, bossing, always winning	Using Male Privilege • Treating her like a servant • Making all the big decisions

• Denying input in visitation and custody decisions • Interrupting	• Acting like the 'master of the castle' • Being the one to define men's and women's roles
	Minimising, Denying and Blaming • Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously • Saying the abuse didn't happen • Shifting responsibility for abusive behaviour • Saying she caused it

Another key difference when comparing the two Duluth models is the absence of any reference to gender in the Abuse of Children Model. Closer examination of this omission reveals how the position of 'father' overlaps with the position of 'man', indicating how the positions of 'adult', 'parent' and gender intersect and inform each role. It is possible that the removal of references to gender in the Model of Abuse of Children is an attempt to ensure the model can accurately reflect the perpetration of violence by either parent, but while a gender-neutral approach may be appropriate for a model of child abuse, the accounts in this study show that gender plays a significant role in experiences of childhood domestic abuse. For example, participants frequently drew on a discourse that positioned fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caregivers. These reports are congruent with studies exploring children's attitudes about intimate partner violence (McCarry, 2009; McCarry & Lombard, 2016; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002). The present study, however, also shows that participants drew on frameworks that were more complex than gender divisions of labour.

Participants in this study consistently identified fathers as holding a dominant position within families, whether or not they were the primary income earner. While many participants cited the unreasonable ways fathers used their power, none questioned their father's right to be positioned as 'head of the family'. A similar theme emerged in McCarry and Lombard's (2016) research, whereby young people identified men's violence against women as wrong yet did not question the entitlement of men to instruct women on how to behave. My findings are also congruent with studies of adult intimate partner violence which have identified that women cite gender norms as creating barriers for them when making sense of their experiences of domestic violence (Towns & Adams, 1997). Feminist theorists have argued that domestic abuse becomes embedded in everyday lives because it is hidden within gender role expectations that

reinforce male control (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, 2004; Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b). So, while the division of labour did influence participants' understanding of their fathers' use of abuse and their mothers' response to it, a broader ideological understanding of the roles of men and women reinforced the right of fathers to control families by virtue of male privilege. As such, the tactic of 'using adult privilege' included in the Model of Child Abuse does not accurately reflect children's experiences of domestic abuse. Instead, the participants' experiences of childhood domestic abuse highlighted intersections of sexism and adultism that form a tactic of abuse more accurately described as 'using paternal or patriarchal privilege'.

The importance of incorporating gender into a model of childhood domestic abuse was also demonstrated by how participants made sense of their mothers' role in families. The accounts presented in this study highlight the damaging impact that childhood domestic abuse has on the mother–child relationship. The damage inflicted on the mother–child relationship through the perpetration of domestic abuse is well documented (see, for example, Damant et al., 2008; Georgsson Staf & Almqvist, 2015; Katz, 2013, 2014; Lapierre, 2010; Lombard, 2016; McCarry & Lombard, 2016; Thiara & Humphreys, 2015). Morris (2009) refers to this process as 'maternal alienation', whereby perpetrators engage in actions that destroy or sabotage the relationship between children and their mothers. As a form of emotional and psychological abuse, maternal alienation operates in conjunction with coercive control to maintain power over children and their mothers. Situating children's experience of domestic abuse within a gendered frame allows for the inclusion of tactics of maternal alienation. Maternal alienation is a devastating tactic unique to children's experience of domestic abuse, and as such must be included in any model that seeks to accurately capture children's experiences.

Combining the Duluth Model of Power and Control with its sister Model of Abuse of Children provides a broader understanding of childhood domestic abuse that recognises how experiences of age discrimination and gendered violence intersect to influence children's lived experiences. However, incorporating experiences of child abuse into a model specific to childhood domestic abuse stands in contrast to the approach of many previous studies on this topic. Earlier work has instead sought to cleave off large sections of children's experiences of childhood domestic abuse by attempting to separate child abuse from domestic abuse. This process excludes

children who have experienced physical abuse by a parent from studies that seek to understand the phenomena of 'child witnessing' domestic abuse as something distinct from child abuse. However, studies show that children experience abuse as part of the pattern of violence perpetrated against their mothers and vice versa (Eriksson, 2012; Eriksson & Näsman, 2012; Hester, 2011; Hester & Radford, 1996; McGee, 2000), which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to separate experiences of child abuse from domestic violence (Holt et al., 2008; Humphreys et al., 2008). Attempting to separate children's experiences of child abuse from domestic abuse is akin to rendering women's experiences of physical assault as unrelated to the patterns of threat and intimidation generally accepted as part of intimate partner violence. It would be the equivalent of removing the outer ring of the Duluth Model of Power and Control to be left with tactics of non-physical abuse that no longer possess the mechanisms of fear needed to enforce them. Humphreys et al. (2008) emphasise the importance of understanding witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse as parts of a whole in which children are more involved than by merely observing from a distance.
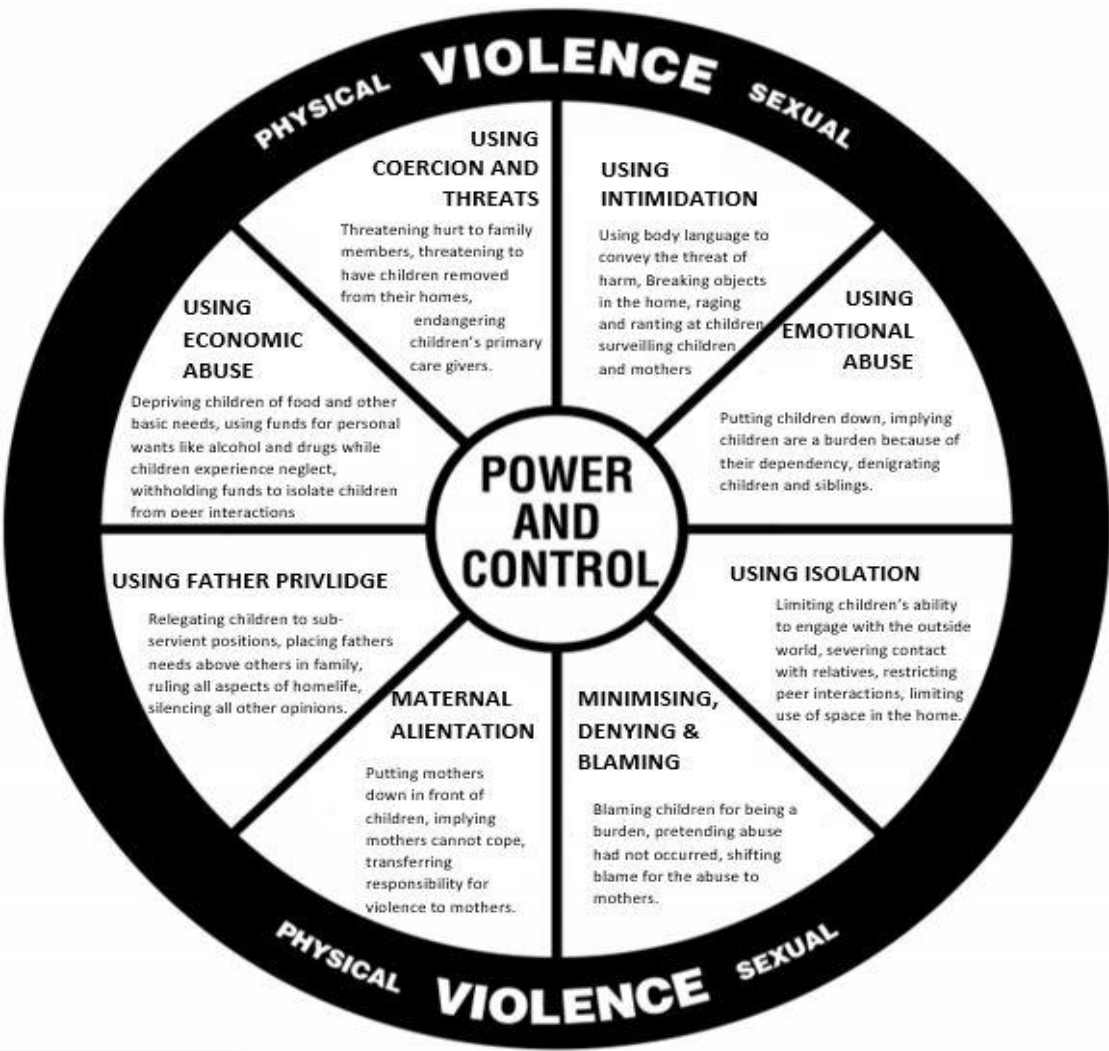
Figure 5. Proposed Model of Childhood Domestic Abuse, adapted from the Duluth Model of Power and Control

Including direct experiences of child abuse as a part of childhood domestic abuse makes it possible to recognise how intertwining systems of oppression inform children's shared experiences of living in domestically abusive families. In recognition of this gap, I propose a revised model (see Figure 5, above) to more accurately represents the experiences of the participants who contributed to this study. In this model, tactics of abuse include father privilege; economic abuse; coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimising, denying and blaming; and maternal alienation.

These tactics of power and control used to oppress children through the perpetration of childhood domestic abuse are reinforced by direct and indirect experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse. This revised model shows how childhood

domestic abuse is both similar to and different from adult's experiences of intimate partner violence. However, it is inaccurate to suggest all children experience domestic abuse in the same way. A range of other intersecting social locations and systems of oppression operate in ways that ensure children's experiences of domestic abuse are diverse even within the category of child. In the next sub-section, I explore how heterogeneity within the category of childhood creates diverse and unique experiences for children.

8.1.3 Exploring the Diversity of Children's Experiences of Domestic Abuse

Intersectionality tells us that experiences of domestic abuse are shaped by a variety of aspects of a person's identity (Creek & Dunn, 2011; Eriksson, 2012). Therefore, it cannot be assumed that domestic abuse has a singular impact on all survivors (Bograd, 1999; Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016). Understanding the multiple and intersecting systems of oppression at play in specific cases can facilitate a nuanced understanding of survivors' experiences of violence (Etherington & Baker, 2016) and highlight that not all individuals who experience domestic abuse have the same types of experience and nor do they respond in the same ways (Josephson, 2002). Accounts from this study provide insight into the intersecting experiences of oppression that can compound the impact of living with childhood domestic abuse. As such, children's experiences of abuse can be understood as pervasive and ongoing, and as parts of a regime of power and control within families that also exists within varying systems of oppression. It is in stories such as those that inform this study that the amplification of childhood domestic abuse is made visible by the identification of the 'microaggressions' of racism, heterosexism and classism (Bograd, 1999; Eriksson, 2012).

The oppressiveness of childhood domestic abuse can be amplified by racist microaggressions that serve to increase the social risks and degradation of those seeking assistance and support (Bograd, 1999). In the present study, participants reported experiencing a sense of displacement when racial discrimination and other forms of inequality intersected in the context of childhood domestic abuse. Racial prejudice and age inequality intersected in ways that excluded participants from supports which can reduce the impact of childhood domestic abuse. Instead, a sense of 'not belonging' reverberated through the narratives when participants discussed

experiences of racism. For example, one participant remembered racist slurs related to her Aboriginality being used by police, teachers and clergy. For this participant, institutionalised racism reinforced feelings of worthlessness and isolation that were simultaneously entrenched by experiences of age inequality and patriarchy, all of which were complicit in her abuse. She described how she felt silenced both inside and outside the family unit, and how at one point she viewed suicide as the only way to escape her experiences of oppression and abuse. These experiences of institutionalised racism reinforced her position as 'other', and pushed her to the margins of her communities.

Highlighting how systems of racism intersect to compound experiences of domestic abuse, one participant explained that, as a child, she felt that the services available were not there for her but only for those who lived in the 'white world'. Two Aboriginal participants discussed how deep fear of being removed from their families by human services organisations further entrenched their silence. Such accounts show how white privilege and a history of colonialism can inform mistrust of support services (Bessarab & Crawford, 2013) and are congruent with the childhood domestic abuse literature showing that children from minority backgrounds experience barriers to involving outside agencies out of fear of a racist response (Mullender et al., 2002). Writers exploring the perspectives of Aboriginal people have argued that the invisibility of white privilege and institutionalised racism in Australia has made it possible for Aboriginal people to be treated differently from others, which can result in their self-exclusion from support services (Bessarab & Crawford, 2013; Paradies, 2006).

In addition to not accessing services, it was clear that places of refuge were less available for people who experienced racial discrimination. The Aboriginal women who participated in this study discussed how school had been a place of fear for them as a result of racial discrimination. This experience contrasted sharply with those of most non-Aboriginal participants, who identified school as a place where they could experience success, value and acceptance. Some participants discussed how they were able to throw themselves into scholastic or extra-curricular pursuits as a way of finding success and diversion. Highlighting the value of school as a safe place to speak about domestic abuse, two of the participants directly attributed their access to complicating actions to the support available to them through the school system. The absence of

these opportunities for non-white participants indicates how the oppression of age inequality and patriarchal experiences in the home, as a result of childhood domestic abuse, are further compounded through the intersection of race. These findings are congruent with feminist research exploring women's experiences of racism and domestic violence (McGee, 2000), as well as children's (Mullender et al., 2002).

Intersections of class privilege further exacerbated childhood experiences of domestic abuse. The survivors who contributed to this study originated from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Two of the participants indicated that they grew up in wealthy homes, while three described their childhoods as embedded in conditions of extreme poverty. The rest of the participants fell somewhere in between these stratifications. The accounts presented in this study support the oft-cited claim that domestic abuse transcends class. Some of the participants who had lived in affluent families discussed the myth that domestic abuse does not occur in the 'good suburbs'. For these participants, the expectation that wealth precluded domestic abuse reinforced the pressure they felt to hide their experiences. For example, one participant classified her father's behaviour as an embarrassment 'given their station'. On the other hand, participants from low socio-economic backgrounds discussed feeling unable to disclose their fathers' violence for fear of reinforcing stereotypes of that behaviour resulting from poverty. Regardless of class location, sharing experiences of domestic abuse with the outside community places families at risk of judgement based on their social location (Creek & Dunn, 2011; De Vidas, 2000; Kanuha, 1990). This finding supports McGee's (2000) study, which also found that the idea that only women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are victims of domestic abuse can influence whether or not someone has access to support.

While it is essential to recognise that domestic abuse has the potential to affect anyone's life, care must be taken to ensure that factors such as class do not become trivialised as an underpinning axis of oppression (Eriksson, 2012). Accounts in this study indicated that experiencing poverty significantly limited opportunities for participants to engage in activities with people outside their families. For those with the economic means, activities such as sporting pursuits or social occasions have an intervening effect on living with domestic abuse (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002). Some participants who lived in wealthy families discussed how they relished opportunities to escape their home lives for a short time while engaged in extra-

curricular activities. However, those living with financial hardship described discarding notices about school trips or sporting opportunities rather than handing them to parents, because they knew they would not be able to afford to go. These sacrifices constrained some participants' opportunities for respite from the pressures of abuse at home.
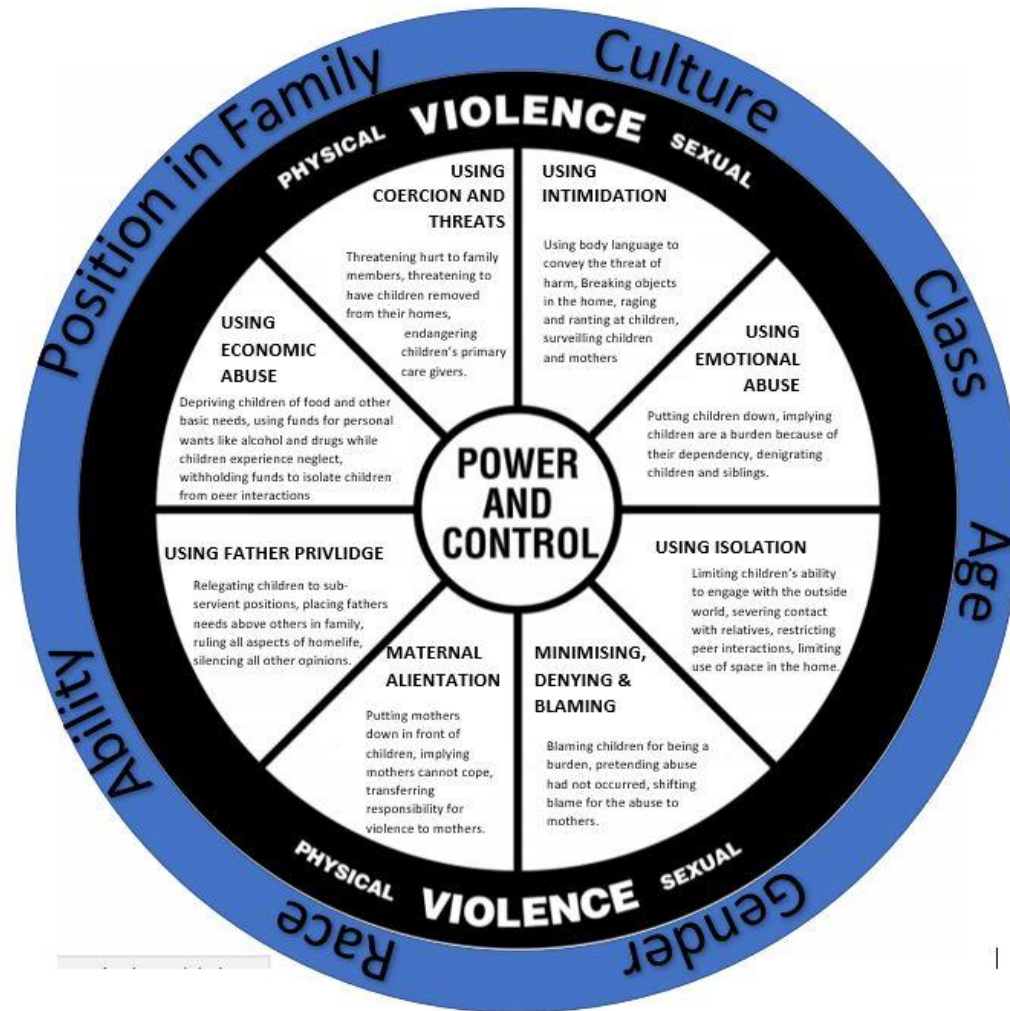

Figure 6. Proposed Model of Childhood Domestic Abuse Inclusive of Intersections of Systems of Oppression, adapted from the Duluth Model of Power and Control

Recognising childhood domestic abuse as an operation of power and control creates an alternative discursive space in which children's everyday experiences of chronic abuse can be fully realised (Callaghan et al., 2015). Furthermore, understanding that children's experiences of domestic abuse are varied, pervasive and complex provides insight into the uniqueness of childhood experiences of domestic abuse. Given these findings, it is somewhat unsurprising that responses and resistances to childhood domestic abuse are similarly nuanced. In the next section, I discuss how children respond to and resist perpetrators actions from within a context of domestic

abuse that is diversely experienced through varying social locations and corresponding systems of oppression.

8.2 RESPONDING TO AND RESISTING CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE

Recognising children's experiences of living in an everyday context of intersecting systems of oppression broadens an understanding of the diverse landscape of childhood domestic abuse. Once this wider lens is applied, it becomes possible to see children's responses and acts of resistance in a new light. In this section, I argue first and foremost, that children are not passive recipients of adult violence, abuse and control. Children are instead active social agents who resist the perpetration of gendered violence in myriad ways. In the second subsection, I show how survivors of childhood domestic abuse engage in change as they make sense of their experiences. This process of change includes experiences of turning points that facilitate shifts in how the participants understand and respond to domestic abuse.

8.2.1 Children as Active Social Agents

A key finding of this study is that children are actively and relationally engaged when living within an everyday context of domestic abuse. As engaged beings, children respond to domestic abuse in a variety of ways, and in doing so they challenge the idea that they are passive victims (Callaghan, Alexander & Fellin, 2016; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015; Callaghan, Alexander, Sixsmith, et al., 2016; Mullender et al., 2002; Mullender & Morley, 1994, 2001; Naughton et al., 2019; Overlien, 2010, 2012; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). Congruent with recent qualitative studies of childhood domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2018; Överlien & Hydén, 2009), the present study shows that survivors actively resist the violence and abuse perpetrated by fathers or father figures. All of the participants told stories in which their actions were congruent with Kelly's (1988b) description of resistance, which includes opposing, fighting against, or refusing to submit to or cooperate with the perpetrator.

The narratives presented in this study show that participants engaged in two distinct forms of resistance. A combination of 'protective' and 'oppositional' strategies were used by participants to stay safe in the face of danger, to refuse to submit or cooperate with the abuse, or to oppose or contest it directly. These findings are comparable to other research exploring childhood domestic abuse which has made similar distinctions between children's responses to abuse. For example, some of the terms used to describe how children react to abuse include 'withstanding' and 'opposing' (Anderson & Danis, 2006), 'intervening' and 'ignoring' 'accommodating' and 'resolving' (Hague et al., 2012), and 'passive' and 'active' (Allen, Wolf, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003). A commonality among many of these terms is their inclination to categorise responses as either passive or active.

Rather than categorising responses as passive or active, children's responses are recognisable as forms of resistance embedded and entwined with stories about violence and oppression. Yuen (2007) refers to these accounts of resistance as 'second stories' buried beneath the dominant story of persecution. By actively seeking out these stories of resistance within the rubble of stories of destruction, this study has uncovered these second stories to reveal the resourcefulness, determination and creativity of participants' actions when responding to childhood domestic abuse.

Participants drew on their unique knowledge and experience to actively oppose the perpetration of abuse, or to orchestrate protection from it. Oppositional strategies included speaking back to fathers about abuse, intervening in interparental violence, and calling outside attention to abuse. Alternatively, participants' protective strategies entailed removing themselves from danger, escaping oppression through creative engagement, and using pre-emptive actions to avoid potential abuse. While there were apparent differences between these strategies, the aim to actively effect change underpins both. Protective strategies of resistance worked to mediate the impact of the abuse while oppositional strategies aimed to stop the violence from occurring. Consequently, all responses were active and intentional rather than passively reactive. This finding is akin to other childhood domestic abuse research that, through recognising the agency implicit in children's actions, has acknowledged that children always respond to abuse in some way (Callaghan, Alexander & Fellin, 2016; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2016; Överlien, 2010, 2013; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

Acknowledging that children are active agents living within an everyday context of ongoing oppression is critical to unearthing the nuanced way children respond to abuse. For example, the participants in this study discussed how they had maintained a sense of agency, found ways to resist tactics of abuse, protected themselves and others, and strove to build a more positive sense of self. Other writers have also argued that children resist tactics of coercive control and domestic abuse daily in every aspect of their childhoods (Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2013, 2014, 2016). Despite these accomplishments, much of the previous literature about children's experiences of domestic abuse has conflated their responses and resistances within the construct of 'coping' (Allen et al., 2003; DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011; Hague et al., 2012; Kerig, 2003; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

Viewing children's responses through the 'coping' lens renders many of their actions and resistances invisible or ineffectual due to their perceived passivity. For example, one participant discussed soundlessly standing her ground and making eye contact with her father as a deliberate strategy to limit his physical assault on her mother. In the coping literature, these types of actions are classified as 'passive non-involvement' (Kerig, 2003) or 'emotion-focused' coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), and have been labelled as less beneficial and less successful (Aras & Pape, 1999) than more active responses (Överlien & Hydén, 2009). However, far from passive or uninvolved, the participant in the example above determinedly kept silent and drew on her knowledge that her watchfulness had mediated her father's violence in the past. All the while, she recognised and used her power to alter the situation through her stillness. These actions clearly constitute resistance to the perpetration of domestic abuse. Callaghan and Alexander (2015) suggest that such gentle and careful acts of resistance can sometimes look like an accession to abuse and control when viewed in isolation from the meaning attached to them. Applying coping theory to the study of childhood domestic abuse decontextualises children's experiences and fails to recognise or value many of their responses (Wade, 1997; Kerig, 2003; Överlien & Hydén, 2009; DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015).

A further problem in applying coping theory to the study of childhood domestic abuse is its tendency to privilege more active forms of coping overprotective or emotion-focused strategies (Överlien & Hydén, 2009). The participants were living in an environment of chronic trauma characterised by fragmentary and unpredictable

patterns of abuse and violence that carried a risk of serious harm. Over-valuing active forms of responding fails to recognise the danger that children face when living with perpetrators of domestic abuse. As Wade (1997) explains, those who engage in acts of violence or oppression can generally be counted on to quash any challenge to their authority, often with great ferocity. Thus, children are sometimes at significant risk of harm when they employ more overt or oppositional strategies of resistance. Indeed, in this study, occasions when participants actively and physically opposed their fathers' use of abuse and control sometimes resulted in fathers' redirecting violence and abuse towards them. Privileging active responses, as a healthier way of coping ignores the inherent danger to children who live with domestic abuse, and risks encouraging actions that may have a life-threatening outcome (Överlien & Hydén, 2009). At the same time, this privileging can mean that protective actions that serve to quietly keep families safe remain unrecognised or devalued as active forms of resistance.

In this section, I have argued that children actively resist the perpetration of domestic abuse in a range of ways. However, the application of a normative frame of coping to the literature on childhood domestic abuse has set a standard of what constitutes positive responses to domestic abuse (Anderson, 2010). Without drawing on a contextual understanding of childhood domestic abuse, much of the previous inquiry into children's experiences fails to recognise the nuanced ways in which children respond (Anderson, 2010). In the final section of this chapter, I explore in more depth the various ways that the participants responded when living with domestic abuse. I show how, rather than responding only to separate and distinct incidents of violence and abuse, their narratives suggest that children undergo a transformative process in how they make sense of their experiences of domestic abuse.

8.3   CHANGE IN AN ONGOING CONTEXT OF ABUSE

In this study, experiences of childhood domestic abuse were not, as the theory of intergenerational violence suggests, linear trajectories in which children passively learnt that domestically abusive families were the norm. Instead, the participants incorporated knowledge from various social interactions to build hope and resolution for a future free from abuse. Unlike many earlier inquiries that have investigated childhood domestic abuse, this study invited participants to share stories of change and

transition by positioning them as active social agents during their childhoods, and as surviving in a complex, ongoing and oppressive context. The unveiling of these stories was made possible using a narrative approach. By using a narrative-informed methodology, this research captured stories that bring into question the dominance of previous research designs focused on children as passive and damaged victims.

Two forms of data analysis were used to examine the narratives in this study. I conducted a thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2004) to gain an understanding of the common themes across a variety of experiences, as well as a structural narrative analysis to gain an understanding of the uniqueness of participants' experiences of living with domestic abuse. By focusing on individual experience in an analysis of each narrative, it becomes possible to identify the individuality of participants' experiences, but, at the same time, similar patterning of events in participants' arrangement of their stories can emerge (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Mishler, 1995). For example, the narratives analysed in this study showed a progression for participants from viewing violence as a natural part of the disciplinary rights of all fathers to instead seeing it as something intrinsic specifically to their families. These stories of change are revealed because of the implicitly novelistic impact of using a narrative approach (Patrick, 2016). Just as could be expected from a novel, each of the narratives examined in this study revealed plot twists or turning points that indicated a change in the story. Such directional changes are commonly referred to in narrative analysis as 'complicating actions' (Kim, 2015).

In each of the narratives analysed in this study, complicating actions were pivotal points in how participants made meaning of their experiences of domestic abuse. Studies conducted with women about the decision-making process involved in exiting an abusive relationship have identified similar plot structures to those that emerged in my research (see, for example, Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001; Catallo et al., 2012; Zink, Elder, Jacobson, & Klostermann, 2004). Some of these studies conducted with adult women have made use of the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992; Prochaska et al., 2002) to make sense of how women's understanding of their experiences of domestic abuse changes over time, and how these changes affect their decisions to exit relationships (Burke et al., 2001) or to disclose the abuse to an outside source (Catallo et al., 2012). The findings of these qualitative explorations indicate that women progress through stages

– nonrecognition, acknowledgement, consideration of options, selection of actions and use of safety strategies – to remain free (Burke et al., 2001). A similar matching of stages appears to be relevant to the narrative structures analysed in the present study, suggesting that the Transtheoretical Model of Change can be useful in understanding how children respond to experiences of domestic abuse.

The Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 2002) suggests that individuals progress through five stages when making behavioural changes: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Catallo et al., 2012; Prochaska et al., 2002). These stages share similar characteristics to processes participants in this study used to make sense of their experiences of childhood domestic abuse and to formulate their responses. Parallels can be drawn between the stages of change detailed in the Prochaska et al. model and patterns of events identified in the participants' narratives. For example, when the Transtheoretical Model of Change is applied to the topic of domestic abuse, the pre-contemplation stage, as the first stage of change, corresponds to occasions in which the perpetrator's abuse is deemed to be somewhat normal and socially sanctioned behaviour (Zink et al., 2004). Correspondingly, the present study revealed that, in the early stages of experiencing childhood domestic abuse, participants were more likely to describe their understanding of the abuse as a 'normal' part of their childhood, or as an extension of their father's right to discipline the family. The fear and danger produced by violence was identified by the participants, while the actual abusive actions of fathers remained unproblematised by the participants in the early stages of the narratives. Catallo et al. (2012) claim that individuals who are in the pre-contemplation stage lack awareness of their problems and therefore do not seek to effect change. However, I would suggest that the participants in this study were acutely aware of the problem of violence; they were frightened, and they knew to engage in actions to ensure their survival. However, what was missing was an awareness that the violence they were experiencing was not an acceptable part of the role of fathers.

Survivors of intimate partner violence who are in the pre-contemplation stage are more likely to utilise defensive responses than responses that seek to change the actions of the abuser (Burke et al., 2001; Catallo et al., 2012). Again, the narratives that inform this study correspond with these assumptions of the transtheoretical model of change. Participants indicated that, in their early experiences of domestic abuse,

they were more likely to respond in ways intended to keep themselves and their family members safe by using protective strategies. These responses included finding places of safety, being ready to respond to the unpredictable, constraining their behaviour, and using imagination to access reprieve. Participants did not disclose their experiences of violence to those outside their homes. Research conducted by Howell et al., (2015) suggests that decisions not to disclose experiences of violence often result when young people do not recognise the violence as wrong. When viewed in the context of not recognising gendered violence as a social problem, their accounts show that children actively respond to and resist the perpetration of violence and abuse. As such, they are not passive victims; children are instead active social agents responding to their experiences of violence with all the resources available to them at the time.

Experiences reported in this study show that participants continued to use mostly protective responses to domestic abuse well into the contemplation stage. Prochaska et al. (1992) describe the contemplation stage as a period of developing an awareness of the problem that triggers consideration of different ways of responding. In this study, the narratives indicate that the emergence of complicating actions influenced the contemplation stage. Complicating actions are epiphanies or turning points which signal a change of direction in the narrative (Kim, 2015). Access to such turning points for the participants in this study was contingent on intersecting systems of oppression, types of domestic abuse experienced, and social location. For example, participants who experienced racial discrimination, poverty and extreme forms of social isolation were less likely to access the types of interaction that resulted in complicating actions. Despite these constraints, each of the participants mentioned at least one pivotal experience or set of experiences drawn from multi-dimensional social processes (Kim, 2015) that indicated a shift in how they made sense of their fathers' abuse. The most common complicating actions included experiencing non-abusive family life and the influence of one significant other person who invited an alternative way of understanding the role of fathers in families. Participants' awareness that the violence and abuse they experienced was specific to their families rather than a natural feature of the operation of all families multiplied their response options.

Participants absorbed and assimilated new information that arose from their experience of complicating actions quietly and carefully. Most participants watched and analysed the different ways that other families operated and compared these

experiences to their own. These actions are typical responses of individuals in the contemplation stage of Prochaska's (2002) model. In this stage of change, information is weighed up and processed, but strategies of responding generally remain unchanged (Burke et al., 2001; Catallo et al., 2012; Prochaska et al., 2002). Research has shown that how children understand and appraise domestic abuse influences how these events impact them (Grych et al., 2003; Naughton et al., 2019). According to hooks (2014), the building of new knowledge relating to subservience is fundamental to overcoming circumstances of entrenched social oppression. In line with hooks' assertion, it did appear that the alternative knowledge gained through complicating actions formed the commencement of a shift in how the participants understood and responded to the oppression of childhood domestic abuse. A diversion was detectable in the narratives, indicative of a shift in participants understanding domestic abuse from being a part of gendered family life towards it instead being a form of patriarchal control. Catallo et al. (2012) identified a similar process among women who had lived with domestically abusive men. These authors suggest that women experienced 'turning points' in which their understanding of the abuse made it impossible for them to return to the pre-contemplation stage. Participants in this current study reported a similar experience where, once the genie was out of the bottle, the sense of injustice became a more powerful motivator than their sense of fear, prompting a change in their responses.

The idea of family life without violence shifted participants' responses from protecting themselves against harm to also incorporating more oppositional strategies that challenged the rights of both parents regarding the existence of domestic abuse. For example, participants spoke up about their experiences of abuse, involved others outside the family unit, and, in some circumstances, directly challenged perpetrators about their use of violence. All these behaviours are indicative of children having entered the action state of the Transtheoretical Model of Change. In the action stage, individuals commit time and energy to effect a change of the circumstances through their responses (Catallo et al., 2012; Prochaska et al., 1992). While it is erroneous to describe children's responses as inactive before the 'action' stage, this next phase of the model does indicate a change in how survivors actively respond to childhood domestic abuse. As such, this stage does not represent the commencement of action, but rather a change in the type of action that the participants generally used to respond to violence and abuse.

In analysing the narratives for this study, I found that the participants moved back and forth across the preparation and action stages as they tried and tested new ways of responding to and resisting the abuse. Participants drew from these experiences of action to sustain ongoing change and construct visions of futures free from domestic violence. The modifications that the participants made to their behaviours generally resulted in the incorporation of more oppositional strategies of resistance. Sometimes oppositional actions served to 'break' the hold that violent fathers had over participants and provided a sense of hope when the power base of perpetrators to enforce control was unsettled. However, the increased use of oppositional strategies was not always useful to participants. For example, the action of intervening to stop perpetrators abusing mothers resulted in physical harm to some participants. Furthermore, inadequate responses to disclosures of abuse and violence by outsiders sometimes served to reinforce ideas that violence was acceptable. Consequently, for many of the participants, the only way for them to enact change that was sustainable in eliminating their fathers' violence from their own lives was to leave the family home and establish their independence.

For the survivors who contributed to this study, experiences of the maintenance stage of the Transtheoretical Model of Change occurred for most after they left the family home under their own steam. Nearly all the participants discussed forming strong commitments to ensuring that they did not experience domestic abuse in their adult lives. Participants strove to ensure they were financially independent, and that their partners were non-violent. Several of the participants had taken up active roles through their work to eliminate violence against women. These outcomes are similar to those in Burke et al.'s (2001) study with adult survivors of intimate partner violence, where women who left abusive men spoke of developing a strong sense of self-protectiveness that centred on not allowing anyone to dominate or hurt them again. Burke et al. (2001, p.1158) identified these actions as falling within the maintenance stage of the Transtheoretical Model of Change, and identified women's actions within this stage as "keeping themselves safe via various strategies". Other studies with adult daughters of domestically abusive men have reported how experiences of childhood domestic abuse were used to inform anti-violent approaches to future intimate relationships (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hague et al., 2012). Such

findings question the idea that children who grow up in domestically abusive homes are conditioned to reproduce the violence in their adult intimate relationships.

8.4   CONCLUSION

Adult survivors' accounts show that children experience domestic abuse as an ongoing context of oppression in which power and control attaches to every aspect of their daily lives. Definitions of childhood domestic abuse confined within a physical incident model have captured only a small selection of children's lived experiences. When the full constellation of abuses that children live with are considered, it becomes clear that current models used to understand children's experiences of domestic abuse omit some key aspects of children's lives with perpetrators. To understand and effectively respond to children's experiences of domestic abuse, it is essential that models are constructed that depict children's holistic experiences. Existing models of coercive control derived from adult's experiences of domestic abuse provide a solid first step towards this goal. However, these models are not one-size-fits-all, and cannot be treated as such.

Operations of power implicit in the social order of children's lives, such as age, gender and kinship, influence their experiences of domestic abuse in specific and unique ways for children as a group. These considerations in models of childhood domestic abuse are critical because they unmask the intersection of adultism as a system of oppression that confounds children's experiences. A model that includes tactics of abuse such as father privilege, economic abuse, coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimising, denying and blaming, and maternal alienation would more accurately reflect experiences of childhood domestic abuse detailed by the participants who contributed to this study. Recognising the enabling and constraining influence of other social locations, such as race, class and age, would further strengthen such a model.

Widening the lens to more broadly understand children's holistic experiences of domestic abuse debunks the idea that children are passive victims and provides scope to recognise the ways in which children respond to and resist abuse. The use of narrative analysis combined with the insight gained from understanding children's holistic experience of domestic abuse allowed this study to unveil pivotal moments at

which participants made meaning of their experiences. By considering domestic abuse as an experience of ongoing perpetration of abuse underpinned by power and control that is influenced by intersecting factors, stories of resistance and change emerged from the narratives. Stages of change could be identified and complicating actions were revealed as turning points in stories of survival. Despite being depicted as passive victims in much of the literature that purports to represent them, the survivors who contributed to this study presented as consistently and actively responding to the ongoing perpetration of domestic abuse that pervaded every aspect of their childhoods. Prochaska et al.'s (2002) model provides a framework through which children's responses to domestic abuse are more visibly embedded in a context of pervasive and ongoing abuse and oppression. It is possible to see, by applying this model of change, that children use all available resources to resist the perpetration of abuse. However, the ways in which they respond are contingent on their understanding of what constitutes domestic abuse. In the next and final chapter, I outline recommendations for further research and practice that consider children as active participants living in oppressive conditions constrained and enabled by social structures.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Survivors of childhood domestic abuse are agentic, creative and responsive, despite the constraints of living in a context of everyday oppression and subjugation. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that experiences of childhood domestic abuse have been simplified by a dominant paradigm that positions children as secondary victims traumatised by their exposure to episodes of adult intimate partner violence. In opposition to this idea, my findings reveal children as active agents, functioning in an everyday environment saturated by ongoing and entwined tactics of abuse and control. From within this context, survivors actively respond to and resist the perpetration of abuse while simultaneously navigating intersecting systems of power. My research contributes to a growing body of literature providing an alternative framing of children who survive domestic abuse as relationally engaged, agentic and competent individuals with unique, varied experiences (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015, 2016; Eriksson & Näsman, 2012; Katz, 2014, 2016; Överlien, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). In this final chapter, I highlight the implications of my findings for research, policy and practice, and acknowledge the limitations of this study.

9.1   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY AND RESEARCH

Understanding domestic abuse as a system of power that is experienced differently by children as a result of varying social locations makes it possible for human service professionals to respond to the specific needs of childhood domestic abuse survivors (Eriksson, 2012). This study reveals that childhood domestic abuse exists as an everyday context of power and control. Despite the commonality of this finding in feminist studies on adult intimate partner violence (Dobash et al., 1992; Kelly, 1988a; Pitman, 2010; Stark, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2012a; Weedon, 1987), research about childhood domestic abuse continues to focus on children's 'exposure' to physically violent incidents between caregivers (Katz, 2016). An approach that fails

to consider non-physical abuse, and aspects of power and control, such as the physical incident model (Stark, 2007, 2009a), is insufficient for understanding children's holistic experiences of domestic abuse (Callaghan et al., 2015; Katz, 2016; Stark, 2017). The physical incident model decontextualises children's experiences, obscures survival strengths, and reinforces the interpretation of their behaviours as passive, problematic or dysfunctional (Anderson, 2010; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2015). Practitioners who conceptualise clients as 'different' or 'damaged' can struggle to identify strengths, which dramatically influences interventions (Anderson, 2010). I propose that there is a need for professionals and researchers working with survivors to become more interested in how they experience childhoods situated in ongoing and multiple contexts of oppression. Such a shift requires a significant change that locates children as competent and knowledgeable subjects, and a refinement of what constitutes the boundaries of childhood domestic abuse.

How domestic abuse is defined and subsequently asked about in research has a profound impact on the types of results produced (Laing & Humphreys, 2013; Murray & Powell, 2009; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). Rather than being concerned about what children may have 'witnessed' or how they are 'exposed to' adult intimate partner violence, the starting point for researchers and practitioners must be to determine what aspects of living with domestically abusive caregivers are most pertinent to children (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Katz, 2016; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002). Such an approach holds the potential to produce an understanding of childhood domestic abuse as a stand-alone social problem, rather than a spin-off effect of adult intimate partner violence (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Callaghan, et al., 2016). My findings, along with other research (Humphreys & Mullender, 2000), suggest that children may not always identify witnessing physical abuse as the most pressing issue for them when living with domestically abusive fathers. This has important implications for children because, as Itzin (2000, p. 357) argues, how domestic abuse is framed directly affects "what is and is not done about it through policy and practice". Thus, the naming and framing of domestic abuse becomes the first step in the process of effecting change (Laing & Humphreys, 2013).

Young people require a useful and clear understanding of what domestic abuse entails if they are to identify whether they are experiencing it (Etherington & Baker,

2016; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002). All too frequently, anti-domestic violence messages depict passive young children weeping while the physical assault of mothers by shadowy figures of threatening men occurs in the background. My research suggests that these images may not reflect the daily experiences of young people living in an atmosphere of subversive power and control. Indeed, most of the survivors who contributed to my study stated that their experiences were not 'serious enough' or 'as bad as others', suggesting that their idea of what constitutes 'real' childhood domestic abuse differed from their own experiences. Widening the definition of childhood domestic abuse to include non-violent aspects of power and control will more accurately capture the experiences of survivors (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010) and enable children to more readily recognise experiences of domestic abuse, particularly in the pre-contemplation stages of experiences of abuse or abusive relationships that are not necessarily physically violent.

Providing a broader understanding of childhood domestic abuse as a context of power and control opens a window onto children's previously hidden or misinterpreted survival strengths (Callaghan et al., 2015). My research demonstrates that survivors use a range of responses to keep themselves safe and oppose the perpetration of abuse. The types of responses and resistances used by survivors are the result of complex assessments and appraisals based on previous experiences and accumulated knowledge. However, some acts of resistance or response are not always evident to professionals and other adults (Överlien & Hydén, 2009), or may be interpreted as problematic or dysfunctional behaviours (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015), particularly when analysed using contemporary coping models. More 'active' coping responses, valued by coping theory, may be too dangerous for children who are living with domestic abuse to always employ (Wade, 1997). Thus, the continued use of coping theory to understand children's reactions to domestic abuse may encourage them to harbour internalised feelings of shame and guilt associated with perceptions of lack of action. My findings suggest that there may be value in developing models of childhood domestic abuse that take into consideration children's experiences of ongoing abuse, rather than just individual abusive incidents (Allen, Wolf, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; Överlien & Hydén, 2009; Wade, 1997).

Rather than focusing on healthy or unhealthy strategies of coping, assisting survivors to unearth stories of resistance can create avenues for them to think

differently about their experiences of domestic abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Wade, 1997; Yuen, 2007). White (2005, p. 20) suggests that helping young people to discover stories of response and resistance can create an "alternative territory of identity" in which they can safely stand and reflect on their experiences. Such an approach provides a pathway for survivors to understand themselves as agentic and influential (Anderson, 2010; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hague et al., 2012; Yuen, 2007). As such, researchers, policymakers and practitioners hold the power to help children recognise themselves as agentic individuals (Mullender et al., 2002) or as passive and damaged victims. To build a more hopeful approach for children living with or recovering from childhood domestic abuse, researchers, policymakers and practitioners must critically reflect on how they engage with dominant theoretical approaches firmly grounded in diagnosis and treatment models that ignore the unique and multilayered experiences of children living in domestically abusive environments.

Domestic abuse is not a monolithic experience with a singular impact on all survivors (Etherington & Baker, 2016). This study has shown how the intersection of multiple identities and systems of oppression influence young people's help-seeking behaviours, their chances to enact resistance, how they make sense of abuse, and their formulation of responses. Similar findings show that adults' experiences of domestic abuse are also heavily influenced by intersections of gender, ethnicity and class (Bograd, 1999; Creek & Dunn, 2011; Damant et al., 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). However, unlike adults, children uniquely experience operations of power based in age, and this positionality only becomes more complicated in the light of other intersecting forms of oppression such as race and kinship (Etherington & Baker, 2016; McCall, 2005).

Childhood domestic abuse is shaped and constrained by children's experiences of structural inequalities (Eriksson, 2012). A need exists for further consideration in research, policy and practice of how existing hierarchies of privilege, power and domination interact in the lives of children living in domestically abusive families (Eriksson, 2012; Etherington & Baker, 2016). Further theorising is required to understand how these hierarchies are supported and maintained more comprehensively, and how broader patterns of discrimination and oppression influence children's entrapment in contexts of domestic abuse.

I have discussed the main implications of this study, which relate to the core argument of this thesis: that children are active social agents living in a context of everyday abuse, but that their agency is constrained in families and communities, and by broader intersecting structures. The key to developing a more comprehensive understanding of experiences of childhood domestic abuse lies in establishing greater consultative practices with young people and survivors. Increasing opportunities for young people to have input into this topic holds the potential to reshape how childhood domestic abuse is understood, to provide more meaningful messages to other young people, to enhance agency, and to recognise children as actively surviving in a dangerous and frightening environment. If interventions for children experiencing or recovering from childhood domestic abuse are to be meaningful, they must be informed by research grounded in the lived experiences of other children or survivors (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Buckley, Holt, & Whelan, 2007; Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Goddard, 2009; Goddard & Mudaly, 2004; Hague et al., 2012; Humphreys & Mullender, 2000; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002; Överlien, 2013; Överlien & Hydén, 2009). Furthermore, increasing the involvement of young people in planning and participating in research about domestic abuse may work towards addressing findings that children do not feel listened to or heard on the issue of abuse (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Goddard, 2009; Goddard & Mudaly, 2004; Humphreys & Mullender, 2000; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002; Överlien, 2013; Överlien & Hydén, 2009).

9.2   RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

It was never the intention of this research to prove cause and effect, or to demonstrate facts about childhood domestic abuse. Instead, the aim was to provide depth rather than breadth of the diverse ways that people experience domestic abuse during childhood. The aim of this qualitative work was to provide, as Mason (2016) describes, a flavour of the experiences of childhood domestic abuse. As such, there is little expectation that a similar design or methodology would yield identical results. It is crucial, however, to reflect on how the sampling strategies used in my research may have influenced the results.

I chose to analyse retrospective accounts of adult survivors' experiences of living with domestic abuse during their childhoods. Retrospective accounts have been problematised for their reliance on recollections and interpretations of the subject, and for the inherent lack of corroboration by any third party or independent person (Hague et al., 2012). Conversely, other research has argued that retrospective studies are reliable enough and sufficiently valid for investigating experiences of abuse and neglect (Hardt & Rutter, 2004).

This study employed a nonprobability sampling strategy in which participants were selected based on their eligibility, as well as their availability and willingness to volunteer. The recruitment process required participants to respond to a recruitment advertisement and volunteer participation. Two factors may have significantly influenced the sample recruited. First, the advertisement called for 'survivors' of childhood domestic violence to apply. Consequently, those who chose to take up the research invitation may have more easily acquainted themselves with the subject position of a survivor. Thus, the sample I recruited may have a more positive outlook on their experience than those who identify with the term 'victim', for example. Conversely, individuals who identified more strongly as victims of domestic abuse may have refrained from answering the advertisement. Thus, it is possible that other members of the public who may be less resilient may have chosen not to participate.

Of those who did take up the invitation to participate, a large percentage were female, with limited cultural and linguistic diversity. It is pleasing to note that two of the 19 participants identified as Indigenous Australians, and three other survivors identified as second-generation Australians. However, many other cultural and linguistic populations were absent. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that the narratives analysed in this study may not resonate with the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse populations, or young males' experiences. Future studies may improve upon this by adopting a more comprehensive array of recruitment channels for people to increase the cultural diversity of the sample, increase the likelihood of male participation, and allow those with literacy issues the opportunity to opt into the research.

9.3 CONCLUSION

In Australia, responding to domestic abuse is now high on the political agenda. For policy and strategy to be effective in addressing the complex issues underlying domestic abuse and, more specifically, how variables influence the way children experience and respond when living in an ongoing context of power and control, it is time that children's experiences of domestic abuse are recognised as a specific and varied form of domestic abuse. To do so, the concept of domestic abuse must be dislodged from the perception that it is violence that occurs between two adults in the context of a family environment. Instead, domestic abuse must be understood as an abusive household gender regime that has ramifications for all who reside in the family. Within such abusive household gender regimes, children occupy specific locations as a result of their status as children that make their experiences similar to but unique from those of adults. Children's experiences are further diversified as a result of their individualised experiences of varying and intersecting systems of oppression. In addition to recognising the diverse ways in which childhood domestic abuse is experienced, it is vital that the various ways that children respond to and resist the perpetration of domestic abuse are recognised. Understanding how children's responses to domestic abuse change depending on involvement with various multi-dimensional social processes gives rise to understanding ways in which messages can be provided to children that help create complicating actions, and to improve responses to children who seek assistance from within these contexts.

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Appendix A

Appendix B

EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC ABUSE
To all survivors of childhood family violence, if you are 18 years or over and have lived in homes where your mother was abused by your father/step during your childhood, you are invited to take part in a new research project.

If you would like to have a chance to tell your story and be listened to, and perhaps contribute to helping young Australian's who live with family violence everyday please text 'info 'to 0455 668 824, scan the QR code, or go to www.childhoodfamilyviolence.com for more information on how to get involved.

Approved Tasmanian Social Science Human Ethics Research Committee
Telephone 6226 7479Approval No. H14544

Appendix C

UTAS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

CHILDHOOD FAMILY VIOLENCE: LIVING IN HOMES WHERE MOTHERS WERE ABUSED BY FATHERS

> ### Invitation
> I am researching at the University of Tasmania and I warmly invite you to take part in a confidential study that looks at what it is like to live with family violence as a child.
> My project aims to develop a clearer understanding of how survivors of childhood family violence coped when living with violent fathers or father figures.
>
> My name is Ella Murphy and you can get in touch with me at any time by telephoning 04   or emailing Ella.Murphy@utas.edu.au

What would you have to do if you were involved in this study? I would need you to have a confidential chat with me. The length of our conversation is somewhat up to you but will probably be somewhere between one and two hours, and could be at a place and time that suits you We could do the interview at the University of Tasmania, Newnham or in a public place or at your home, provided it was safe for us to do so. I'm more than happy to talk with you and clear up any questions you might have before you decide if you want to take part. If you want to know more you can ring me on 0455 668 824 or email me or text me and/or ask me to call you.

What would you have to talk about? I am interested in learning about what it was like for you when you were growing up living with a violent dad or step dad. So anything that you would like to talk to me about that relates to your life at this time would be good. As you speak with me I will most likely ask you some questions to make sure that I understand what you are telling me correctly, but rest assured you wouldn't have to talk about anything that you didn't want. I would also like to use a voice recorder to tape the things you say and I will check to make sure that this is okay with you before I do so. If talking about anything makes you feel uncomfortable we can stop or pause for as long as you want, or we can completely change the subject. It's up to you.

Do you have to take part? Absolutely not, this study is totally voluntary. You can pull out of the study at any time (before, during or after the interview) before January 2016. You don't even have to say why you want to pull out.

Will People Be Able to Identify You? No, people will not be able to identify you in anything I write. I will invite you to choose a fake name (pseudonym) that I will use in everything I write up using your information. I will also change any other identifying information that you might provide. We can talk more about this if you have any concerns or ideas about how we can keep your identity safe.

What is the purpose of this study? My main aim is to learn about how children and young people survive when they have to live with family violence and I believe the best way to do this is to speak to people who lived with family violence during their childhood. By family violence, I'm talking about violence between intimate partners.

More often than not family violence is perpetrated by men against women, so for this study I am researching cases where the male was the perpetrator of the violence. I consider family violence to be things like physical abuses as well as social, emotional and financial abuses. I'm also interested in issues of coercive control, this is where perpetrators of violence take away a person's right to independent decision making and imposes restrictions on their behaviours. Some examples may include dictating the way someone goes about their everyday activities, implementing rules on things such as dressing or cleaning, and demanding that mundane activities are performed in a specific way, at a specific time. Family violence can happen during the relationship and sometimes after separation.

Are there any possible consequences as a result of being involved in this study? In the interview you may share some information with me that feels uncomfortable to talk about, but remember you do not have to talk about anything in the interview if you don't want to. I will check during the interview to make sure that you are okay. I may ask you if you want to stop the interview or change the subject if you seem distressed. If, after the interview, you are feeling upset I could suggest some places that offer some further support (see attached list) for you in case you feel like you need to talk more about anything. However is also very possible that you might find it helpful to talk about some of these past experiences and talking about them in a way that recognises your strengths may help you to feel a little more positively about past actions. You might also feel good about contributing to this research because it aims at helping kids who are in similar situations now to what you were in when you were a child.

Who will see your information? The information that you share with me will be kept confidential. However, it is important that you know if you disclose details about any children who are currently living with family violence, abuse or neglect that I am required by law to report this information to Child Protection Services, but I would certainly tell you before I did so. The things you say in the interviews will be typed up and stored securely at the University of Tasmania so that no-one but my supervisors and I will be able to see it. Once I've finished all the interviews, I will use information I've learned from you and others to write a thesis. A thesis is a long research document that talks about what I am studying, how I did the study and what I found out. When I finish the thesis it will be sent to a couple of people who will read it and mark it, but by this time none of the information will be attributable to you. The thesis will form a part of my assessment for the post-graduate course I am studying at the University of Tasmania.

What will happen to your information once the study is over? The interview transcripts and recorded voice files will be kept in electronic files accessed via a password-protected computer. Back-up copies will also be stored, in a filing cabinet in a locked office, at School of Social Science in the University of Tasmania and kept for a minimum of 5 years following the publication of any reports or articles. After that time all the data will be destroyed.

More Questions? If you have any questions you can ask them at any time, even after study has started. If you wish to ask questions you can contact me or you could also contact any of my supervisors: Dr Sonya Stanford: Telephone: 03 6324 3720 email: Sonya.Stanford@utas.edu.au or Prof. Bob Pease (03) 6324 3217, email: Bob.PeaseHughes@utas.edu.au

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (SSHREC), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the SSHREC, or you have any complaints or concerns regarding the conduct of this study, please telephone the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The HREC project number for this research is H14544.
Thank you for taking the time to consider this study and I would love to hear from you!

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

CHILDHOOD FAMILY VIOLENCE: LIVING IN HOMES WHERE MOTHERS WERE ABUSED BY FATHERS

List of Support Services

Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (Safe at Home) - Counselling and support for adults and children experiencing domestic and family violence
(03) 6434 5477 (North West)
(03) 6336 2692 (North)
(03) 6233 3818 (South)

Freecall 1800 608 122Available weekdays (until midnight) and weekends (4.00pm until midnight)

Website:
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service_information/services_files/family_violence_counselling_and_support_service

Huon Domestic Violence Service: (03) 6264 2222

SHE (Support Help Empowerment): Community-based support service in Hobart
(03) 6278 9090 Website: http://www.she.org.au/

Yemaya: Community-based support service in Launceston : (03) 6334 0305

RAIN: Support service within Anglicare, based in Devonport: (03) 6424 8581

Tasmanian Aboriginal Service: Counselling, legal services, information and advice

    (03) 6234 0700 (Hobart)
    (03) 6331 6966 (Launceston)
    (03) 6431 3289 (Burnie)

Karadi (Women's Aboriginal Corporation): (03) 6272 3511

Uniting Care: Providing Support and Counselling Services: (03) 6334 0895

Centre Care: Providing support and counselling services
    35 Tower Road, New Town – (03) 6278 1660
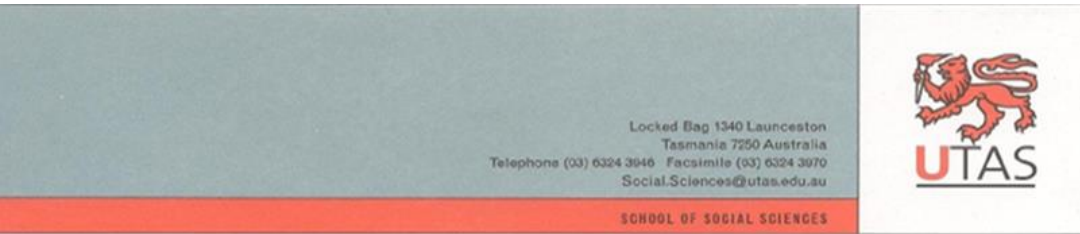   201 York Street, Launceston - (03) 6332 0600
    108 Mount Street, Burnie –(03) 6431 8555
    85 Best Street, Devonport –(03) 6423 6100

Neighbourhood Houses: Provide support and counselling across the State including regional areas.
    For contact details of all houses visit http://nht.org.au/

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Appendix D

CONSENT FORM

CHILDHOOD FAMILY VIOLENCE: LIVING IN HOMES WHERE MOTHERS WERE ABUSED BY FATHERS

I have been asked to give consent to participate in this research study which will involve me completing an interview.

1. I have read the foregoing information sheet for this project or it has been read to me.
2. The nature and the possible effects of this project have been explained to me.
3. I understand that this aspect of the study involves me participating in an interview that would be as long or a short as I choose.
4. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
5. I understand that this research carries the risk that I could experience some distress from remembering my past experiences and understand that if this occurs the interview can be terminated or postponed and that the interviewer will debrief with me and arrange for a counselling referral.
6. I understand that all the research data (interview transcripts and recordings) will be stored on the University of Tasmania premises for 5 years after the completion of the study and will be destroyed when they are no longer required.
7. I agree that research data gathered from this study may be published provided that I am not identified as a participant.
8. I understand that the researcher will maintain my confidentiality and that any information supplied will be used only for the purposes of this study as stated in the information sheet, with the exception of any information that falls under mandatory reporting responsibilities and these responsibilities have been explained to me.
9. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
10. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.
11. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant   :   _____

Signature of Participant   :   _____

Email Address   :   _____

Date   :   _____/_____/2015

STATEMENT BY THE RESEARCHER

☐ I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this participant and I believe that the consent is informed and that s/he understands the implications of participation.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so they have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this study.