

**High heels and high tempers:
a study into female violence**

Sarah Williams

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis provides a critical account of a small-scale study into women who perpetrate verbal, physical and sexual violence towards intimates, acquaintances and strangers of both sexes. The sample was mainly taken from two sources in West Yorkshire: a women's self-help perpetrator counselling group (S.T.O.P), and a women's centre which provides support for females with a history of offending or at risk of offending (the Together Women Project). Using qualitative data collected from anger management group observations and in depth interviews with eighteen female perpetrators and eleven key informants who have come into contact with violent women, this study affords a voice for female perpetrators, whose perspectives and experiences are often overlooked in the UK. This thesis examines the ways in which violent women are understood; not only in terms of how perpetrators understand their own violent behaviour and violent identities, but how others who work with violent women comprehend and problematise such behaviour. This study analyses the nature and character of female violence and investigates the impact of violence upon the lives of perpetrators. It also investigates what influence anger management 'treatment' has upon the relationships and behaviours of violent women. Aware that respondent's understandings of violence are influenced by the matrix of care and control that surrounds them, this study explores the ways in which participants struggle to retain and articulate 'their' own definitions of violence. Findings reveal that some respondents in this study utilised power and control towards both male and female opponents when using violence. Violence was often calculated and rational; for some interviewees it provided great enjoyment, power and a sense of identity. As the issue of female violence is such an under researched topic, these findings not only add an original contribution to the current literature, they sometimes contradict long-standing theories which surround gender identities and violence as a whole.

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Chapter 1: Why Study Female Violence

It is the intention of this chapter to provide an overview of the thesis: to summarise each section and underline the research questions which helped inform this study into female perpetrators of violence.

1.1 Background

Violence is widely recognised as a problem and consequence of masculinity (Braithwaite and Daly 1994; Krahe *et al.* 2005). It is well established that males account for most violence as well as most forms of violent victimisation (Carlen 1992; Walker *et al.* 2009). Statistics indicate that compared to young men, the number of young women who commit violent offences remains low (Batchelor *et al.* 2001; Burman *et al.* 2001). Numerically and statistically insignificant, female violence is easily dismissed as inconsequential compared to the problem of male violence. However, in recent years there has been an increase in women being arrested for violent offences (Martin 1997). This has raised concerns among victim and criminal justice advocates, as it is unclear whether these arrests are a function of changed policing policies, or a reflection of any real increase in women's use of violence (Miller 2001; Burman *et al.* 2001). Nonetheless, research remains divided around a man/woman axis in which general wide-ranging theories of crime causation have been taken to apply to men whilst the crimes of women are assessed from, or in relation to, a male 'norm' (Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). Most empirical research and theoretical explanations of violence have focused on men and boys and the experiences of female perpetrators have largely have been ignored (Brown 2005; Tilly and Brackley 2005). Information on the ways in which women are violent, how they 'manage' and desist from using violence is limited (Burman *et al.* 2001).

Evidence of female aggressiveness questions established interpretations of domestic violence, and contests long-standing conceptions of gender. Violent women are seen as a deviation from the 'norm', they are labelled 'other'. For this reason female perpetrators receive little consistent, organised intervention from the criminal justice system and official agencies (Kalinowska 1995), particularly in the face of current government reform and funding cutbacks. Female offenders find little sympathy and support in the courtroom, the media and public mind. Prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions surround society's

notions of female perpetrators, and are taken into consideration when determining how individuals are treated once in the hands of the criminal justice system and in the media (Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). Violent women are portrayed by the media in highly gendered ways, where their sexuality and 'lack of femininity' are emphasised. Female offenders are made monstrous; they attract public fascination and widespread concern. Escalating levels of young female 'thuggery' have been attributed to family breakdown, 'ladette' culture and binge-drinking (Harris 2011). Whilst the rhetoric surrounding violent and anti-social behaviour by girls echoes concerns about 'troublesome' boys, it also carries an added dimension of gravity precisely *because* they are girls (Burman 2004). Media accounts suggest that female violence is becoming 'normalised'. Despite evidence to the contrary, the idea that women's crime rates are converging with men's remains a popular one.

Of late, the social exclusion needs of female offenders have been dealt with through a range of community-based initiatives (see Gelsthorpe 2010). It is believed that specific services should be provided for female offenders as their needs differ from those men who offend (Together Women Project website). It is argued that the issues women face that make them vulnerable within the criminal justice system are often complex and multiple but commonly include mental health problems, substance misuse, sexual and domestic violence, concerns regarding children's welfare, poverty and homelessness (Together Women Project website). The collaboration and integration of social services for low-level female offenders has been attracting widespread attention (Hedderman 2010). Leeds has a national reputation for developing innovative and broad based work on the issue of violence against women by men they know. Much of this work has been undertaken or supported by the Leeds Inter Agency Project (Grundy 2000: 12). However, in recent years, support groups and resources to assist female perpetrators and offenders have emerged in the area. In order to help bridge the gap in knowledge around female violence in the UK, the Leeds based S.T.O.P and the Together Women project were used to inform this research.

1.2 Synopsis of the research

This small-scale study investigates the issue of women who perpetrate verbal, physical and sexual violence towards intimates, acquaintances and strangers of both sexes. Using a

combination of in-depth interviews, anger management group observations and visual methods, this research stresses the validity of personal experience and creates theory grounded in the understandings of violent women. The perspectives of women who have attended anger management ‘treatment’ are compared with those who have not. The viewpoints of key informants who work with female perpetrators are also explored. Given the small size of the sample and its non-representativeness, it is not the aim of this research to present generalisations on the subject of female violence. In focusing upon the small-scale, this sample adds to existing knowledge by supplying an intensive, richer understanding of female violence. It is not the intention of this study to capture the ‘truth’ of the phenomenon under question. Instead, this research explores how and when female violence is manifested and problematised, analyses the nature and character of female violence and investigates the impact of violence upon the lives of perpetrators. It also investigates what influence ‘treatment’ has had upon the lives, relationships and behaviours of violent women.

Research questions

The questions listed below formed the foundation of this study and helped guide the research:

1) ‘Doing’ violence

How and when is female violence manifested?

What form(s) does it take (physical, emotional, psychological and sexual)?

2) ‘Managing’ violence

How and when is female violence problematised?

What agencies become involved in the lives of female perpetrators?

What impact has ‘treatment’ had upon the lives, relationships and behaviours of violent women?

What strategies do female perpetrators employ to overcome violence?

How are female perpetrators understood by those who come into contact with them?

3) The impact of violence

How has violence impacted upon the lives of female perpetrators?

How do female perpetrators understand their own use of violence?

1.3 Summary of chapters

Chapter 2 Literature review: women and violence

Drawing upon empirical research, this chapter focuses specifically upon the literature surrounding female perpetrators of violence. It explores the rich theoretical and empirical studies that have emerged in recent years, the bulk of which comes from North America (Archer and Graham-Kevan 2003; Archer 2000; Dobash and Dobash 2004). This chapter analyses the divergent arguments among researchers regarding the extent, causes and consequences of female violence. Qualitative and quantitative studies have been criticised for their narrow conceptualisation of the issue, inappropriate outcome indicators (Straus 1993) and limited measurement techniques. Highly gendered pathways to offending have been identified, and it has been argued that the unique experiences faced by female offenders often relate to prior victimisation, issues of mental health, substance abuse and participation in high risk lifestyles (Blackburn and Trulson 2010). Although many scholars assert that women in “batterer” programmes are likely self-defending victims (Martin 1997), it is argued that a large proportion of couple abuse is reciprocal. Studies have found that women also initiate aggression, and this chapter highlights the need to explore the lives of women who commit violence (not only towards partners) in order to better inform prevention and intervention strategies.

Chapter 3 Methodology and research design

This chapter explores and justifies the qualitative research methods employed in this small-scale study. It examines the benefits and limitations of utilising in-depth interviews, visual methods and anger management group observations. The difficulties of negotiating access, coding techniques and ethical issues are analysed. This chapter also takes a reflexive approach by describing the power relationships and imbalances created during fieldwork, and the cathartic experience of participating in in-depth interviews.

Chapter 4 Using violence: how and when is female violence manifested?

Drawing upon the research findings, this chapter will analyse the character and nature of female perpetrated violence. It explores the definitions and categorisations of aggressive acts employed by the participants of this research. Findings of this study demonstrate that women perpetrate a wide range of abusive behaviours towards both males and females. This chapter analyses the 'tricks' and tactics of violence employed by perpetrators, and the ways in which women self harm and are violent towards friends, family members, acquaintances and strangers of both sexes. The influence and bearing the private and public spheres have on women's violent behaviours are also explored.

Chapter 5 Explanations of violence

Following on from the previous chapter which examined the ways in which female aggression is manifested and the tactics of violence employed by perpetrators, this chapter explores the rationale and motivations behind women's use of violence. For many respondents, violence was seen as a 'normal' way of life. A number of interviewees worked towards achieving or preserving a violent reputation; fighting was often condoned, celebrated and used as a survival strategy in order to protect themselves and others in a 'criminal underworld'. Many respondents had experienced a history of abuse from family members and/or intimate partners. Consequently, aggression was sometimes perceived as a 'learned' reaction and/or employed in mutually violent relationships. This chapter considers the ways in which alcohol and drug use fuels women's use of violence, how aggression is at times attributed to a build up of emotions and 'out of control' behaviour. On the other hand, some respondents described employing violence in a rational and calculated way. The addictive qualities of aggression were discussed and violence at times provided a sense of release, enjoyment and a form of entertainment for others.

Chapter 6 Managing anger: the impact of 'treatment' upon female perpetrators

It is the intention of this chapter to shed light on how violent women experience and perceive the Together Women and S.T.O.P 'treatment' programmes. This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section is centred upon experiences of 'treatment' from the perspective of key informants. The second section focuses upon group counselling and the notion of 'S.T.O.P talk' amongst group attendees. Indeed, respondents were likely influenced by the women's centres and criminal justice system. The ways in which

violence was defined and understood by offender support services were projected on to the anger management group members and possibly impacted their stories. This chapter also explores the idea that participants of this study seemed to be both victims and perpetrators of violence. The ways in which narratives of key informants at times directly contradicted the accounts of some female perpetrators is also investigated. To conclude, this chapter argues that more needs to be known about the context of women's lives before interventions can be made.

Chapter 7 'Unleashing the force': violence from a female perspective

This concluding chapter summarises this study with a view to future research. This chapter examines the key themes that are in this study: women's violent identities, women's enjoyment of violence and the impact 'treatment' has upon the lives and behaviours of violent women. As the issue of female violence is such an under researched topic, these findings not only add an original contribution to the current literature, the data questions society's stereotypical judgments and assumptions that women are the 'weaker sex' and always the victims of male violence. This study should be viewed as a starting point for future research with larger sample sizes, with perpetrators who have attended anger management groups and those who have not.

Chapter 2: How are female perpetrators of violence understood?

2.1 Introduction

Receiving little consistent, organised intervention from the criminal justice system and official agencies (see Cook 1997; Parmar and Sampson 2007); female perpetrators of domestic violence find little sympathy and support in the courtroom, the media and public mind (Berrington and Honkatukia 2002). The voices of these 'deviant' women have been discounted, misrepresented and misunderstood (Morrissey 2003). Public representations of battered men and violent women are trivialised and mocked (see George 1994). Often portrayed by the media as 'doubly deviant', female perpetrators are stigmatised for their lack of femininity and deviation from expected gendered norms (Gill 2007; Lloyd 1995; Richardson 2005). In today's society, the media more readily makes apparent the experiences and behaviours of the excluded (Garland 2001); more 'back-stage' performances are routinely exposed (Goffman 1959) and made much less tolerable. Women who do not meet the 'victim' stereotype face judgement from all fields; they are simply branded 'mad' or 'bad' (Appignanesi 2008). Considered a rarity, female violent offenders are regarded as outlandish; the recent reported increase in female 'binge drinking' (Guise and Gill 2007; Saner 2008) and apprehension surrounding girl gangs (Curtis 2008) are but a few examples of society's rising anxiety concerning female aggressiveness. Mythified and made monstrous, violent women attract public fascination and concern (Berrington and Honkatukia 2002).

Interpersonal violence is pervasive, affecting approximately one third of the population at some time in their lives (Mirrlees-Black and Byron 1999). Statistically, one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic violence during their lifetime (see Walby and Allen 2004). Domestic abuse has long been a priority within the UK; recognised as a deep-seated social problem, numerous policy initiatives have been expanded to put the 'victim' at the 'heart of the system' (Parmar and Sampson 2007). In today's society men are traditionally perceived as 'perpetrators', women as 'victims'. Domestic violence initiatives introduced over the last twenty-five years have in fact been driven (Frieze 2005) and clouded by 'feminist' thought. Intellectual and policy activity has proved to be ineffective

and harmful to 'victims' of interpersonal abuse; particularly when current intervention policies take the violence out of its context (see Martin 1997; Miller and Meloy 2006; Walklate 2008). In reality, evidence of female aggressiveness questions established interpretations of domestic violence, and contests long-standing conceptions of gender (Fitzroy 2001; McHugh *et al.* 2005; Morrissey 2003; Myers and Wright 1996). In reality, it is men who experience and perpetrate the majority of violence, whether on the street or in the home (Nicholas *et al.* 2007; Walby and Allen 2004). Despite society's growing politicisation and publicisation of domestic violence, stereotypes and assumptions continue to dominate theory and practice, as female violent offenders are measured against a 'male standard' of rationality and objectivity (Appignanesi 2008; Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003; Pearson 1997). The classification of women as either 'mad' or 'bad' fails to encompass the ambiguities and multiple 'realities' of women's lives (Board 2009; Dobash and Dobash 2004). This way of categorising violent women simplifies female violence; the experiences and beliefs of women are not recognised or comprehended. Research has failed to adequately account for the nature of female offending. The discourses already in place are too crude and one-dimensional; domestic violence is complex and multifaceted. Much of our understanding of interpersonal violence is founded upon research conducted with 'victims' rather than 'perpetrators' (Heise *et al.* 2002; Tilly and Brackley 2005). What is missing in the literature is an analysis of the ways in which female aggressiveness and violence manifest themselves and are problematised by female perpetrators. 'Feminist and cultural theory proliferates with theories of identities and subjective constructions, but few of these theories explore the process by which 'real' women negotiate and understand themselves' (Skeggs 1997: 1).

2.2 Background

Violence is an ambiguous, impalpable conception; it can be exercised positively, to combat prejudice and promote equality (Jack 1999). Violence can also be used destructively, to damage, manipulate and control. Some aggression, such as that on the sporting field, in the military or in the courtroom is widely approved (Garland 2001; Jack 1999). Other aggression is staunchly prohibited and penalised. Prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions surround society's notions of violent perpetrators, and are taken into consideration when determining how individuals are treated once in the hands of the criminal justice system

and the media (Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). Violent crime 'is more a matter of labelling and media-generated moral panics, or else of power relations and insufficient tolerance for diversity' (Garland 2001: 65). The notion of violence is interchangeable; what is perceived to be 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' changes over time and place. Historically, theories of aggression and violence have appeared and disappeared in accordance with popularity, penal policy and public opinion. Indeed, rates of violence and homicide in thirteenth-century England were approximately five to ten times higher than those today (see Nicholas *et al.* 2007). At present, the picture of violent crime is very different. Society's intolerance of violence is seen to have emerged in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to a progressive 'sensitisation to violence', which has steadily reduced the amount of physical violence utilised (and documented) in daily life (Gurr 1981 cited in Stone 1983: 24). It is argued the prime cause of this cultural shift was complex, what Elias (2000) has identified as the 'civilising process'; gradually trickling down from the upper classes to the violence-prone poor (Stone 1983). 'Civilised' codes of conduct necessitate that individuals no longer act rashly and spontaneously towards others, that behaviour is always regarded in terms of how it will influence those we interact with (Burkitt 1999). Goffman (1968) contended that management of the body 'is essential to the maintenance of encounters, social roles and social relations; it mediates the relationship between an individual's self-identity and their social identity' (Shilling 1993: 74 cited in Burkitt 1999: 20). Thus, it could be argued that the 'feminine' body is produced through a mixture of socially constructed body idioms, in which responses and impressions are attempted to be monitored and controlled during social interactions (Gilbert 2002; Goffman 1968; Skeggs 1997). The social meanings ascribed to 'feminine' bodily performances become internalised and wield a powerful affect on an individual's sense of 'self' and feelings of inner worth (Burkitt 1999; Skeggs 1997). If violent women's bodily appearance and performances classify them as 'failed' members of society by others, it is argued that they will incorporate this label into a 'spoiled' self-identity (Gilbert 2002; Goffman 1968). Having transcended gender roles, violent women may feel shame, humiliation and failure (Skeggs 1997). However, individual experiences cannot be generalised and neatly compartmentalised. Foucault's (1977) anti-essentialist view of the self proposes that the self is 'necessarily unstable, disunited and fragmented' (Andrews 2000: 115 cited in Pringle 2005: 269). This position allows understanding of why few women typify the traits

traditionally related to 'dominant forms of femininity' (Pringle 2005). Foucauldian theorising allows 'for a focus on the contradictions of experience, not as failures of rational thought, but as the creative source of new understandings, new discourses' (Davis 1989: 139 cited in Pringle 2005: 269).

Definitions and images of violence have typically been associated with and explained in terms of physicality, toughness and aggression. Society has constructed violence as a stable (male) category, and has largely overlooked female violence (Bjorkqvist 1994). When female perpetrators have been the object of study, violence has been usually measured in terms of physical aggression (see Archer 2000; Maccoby and Jacklin 1974). Aggression is in the realm of men; because the institutions of science, law and the media are predominantly in the hands of men (Berrington and Honkatukia 2002), violence is viewed in light of its male 'instrumental' use to control and humiliate (Heidensohn 1996). It would seem that these institutions have come to influence the limits and boundaries of 'acceptable', 'adequate' behaviour (Foucault 1977). Violence is 'male', 'macho' and therefore, expected whereas the same behaviour by women is conceived as abhorrent or a cause for concern (Berrington and Honkatukia 2002; Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). Violent women are seen as a deviation from the 'norm', they are labelled 'other' (Pearson 1997). In the literature, there has been a notable focus upon the gender gap or between-sex differences, instead of examining within-sex differences and similarities in female aggression (Gilbert 2002). 'There is a belief that there exists something distinct about men and the experience of 'being a man' which (at the very least) disposes men to criminality in a way which differentiates them from women' (Collier 1998: 4). This is confirmed by criminal statistics, criminal justice system operations and lived experience. According to Innes (1999: 6), 'tough' and 'toughness' are associated with 'man' and 'masculine', but they really have little to do with the physical body. In reality, 'any subject who presents an effective performance of toughness can be tough, despite the body's sex' (Innes 1999: 22). Violent, 'tough' women therefore show that 'masculine' characteristics are not identified biologically but are 'a carefully choreographed performance that either a man or a woman might engage in' (Innes 1999: 179). However, society gives contradictory messages regarding how aggressive women 'should' be. While gaining equal opportunities, women are expected to maintain behaviours that are traditionally 'feminine' (Heidensohn 1996; Henning and Feder 2004; Jack 1999; Lloyd 1995). Crime is seen as primarily a

'masculine' activity; women enact violence within a society that believes men are and should be more aggressive and violent than women (Jack 1999). This influences the self-perception of female violent offenders and the judgements made upon them (Stanko and Scully 1996). Social expectations affect what parts of their experiences and beliefs women are willing to reveal and what parts they veil. This is a consideration I will bear in mind during my own research.

The proposition that women are less violent than men by nature raises worrying conclusions about the innate moral superiority of women (Jones 2000; Lloyd 1995) and essentialism of men. Women join men on the battlefield (Moser and Clark 2001), in the courtroom and in sports arenas (Gill 2007). Women resist domination, combat inequality and push for social change (see Jack 1999). Evidence suggests that in intimate relationships women are physically, emotionally, psychologically and financially violent (Archer 2000; Clements *et al.* 2007; Gormley 2005; Straus 1993). However, stereotypically, women are seen to be driven to violence by jealousy, express aggression indirectly; to suppress their anger, exhibit irrationality and employ aggression only in defence (see Campbell 1997; Lloyd 1995). However, women in addition to men can and do control, manipulate and exert power. Attention to male aggression and misrepresentation of female aggression may represent an unwillingness to consider similarities between women and men (Baron and Richardson 1994; Gilbert 2002). Counter to the argument that female violence is always damaging and destructive, I found during my own research that women may obtain a sense of pride and security from their own use of aggression. In one instance it was used to protect family members, and to carry on a violent family tradition (Williams 2006). A women's use of violence can reinforce her belief in her capacity 'to affect positive outcomes and serve as a tool for survival and resistance' (Jack 1999: 29).

2.3 Misconceptions within the current research literature

A substantial literature now exists on trends in female crime, similarities and differences in patterns and contexts of offending by women and men (see Chesney-Lind 1997). Entrenched in the influential works of Durkheim and Freud, traditionally the trend has been to trace female criminality to biopsychological stresses (see Appignanesi 2008) and male criminality to environmental stresses (see Cloward and Piven 1979). Female aggressiveness has been attributed to biology (Lombroso and Ferrero 1895), menstruation

(Dalton 1961), socialisation (Wisdom and Ames 1988), battered women's syndrome (Walker, 1993), learned helplessness (Seligman 1975) and diminished responsibility (Card 1984). Some studies show that there is much overlap in the factors predictive of both male and female criminality (see Jewkes 2002). Like male offenders, female offenders are typically of low socioeconomic status, poorly educated, underemployed or unemployed and disproportionately from minority groups (see Jewkes 2002). Patriarchy, poverty, alcohol and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are possible causes that have long been the topic of public and academic contention (see Jewkes 2002). Disagreement among researchers regarding the causes and consequences of female violence has been ardent and widespread.

In spite of the recent surge of literature surrounding female violence, inconsistent, contradictory research findings have perplexed and confused both academics and policy makers (Archer 2000; Abel 2001; Adler and Worrall 2004). Female violent crime remains hidden and misconceived, which has affected our understanding of domestic violence as a whole. Accurate official data regarding violent women and atypical violent dyads are fragmentary and difficult to access. Domestic violence is multifaceted; 'not only in terms of its dynamics, but also in terms of how it is presented, who it is presented by and who it is presented for' (Palin-Davis 2006: 11). 'The longstanding argument in the literature regarding the gender symmetry of intimate partner violence takes the shape of a disagreement about the nature of heterosexual intimate partner violence as if heterosexual partner violence were a single phenomenon' (Johnson 1995: 284). The last two decades have seen a divergence in opinion between family violence researchers and the feminist movement. The feminist perspective (Kurz 1993) presents convincing empirical confirmation that heterosexual intimate partner violence is mostly a problem of men assaulting female partners (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Dutton *et al.* 2005). On the other hand, the family violence perspective presents conflicting empirical evidence that women are as violent as men in intimate relationships (see Straus 1993). The question has increasingly become one of 'who is likely to use violence against an intimate partner: men, women or both?' (Dobash and Dobash, 2004: 325) 'Theorists have been caught up in the 'masculine or feminine' dilemma regarding violence; they have persisted in the quest for global, historical, monocausal and essentialist explanations' (Carlen 1985: 8).

2.4 Family violence research

Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) studies remain a central feature in the discussion regarding violent women, and have exposed analogous levels of partner violence perpetrated by men and women (Straus 1993). Family violence researchers have long argued that domestic violence is a 'symmetrical', mutual phenomenon (see Straus 1993). Upholding a gender-neutral belief of power within intimate relationships, it is maintained that the origins of interpersonal violence lie in the nature of the family, not in the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife (see Straus and Gelles 1995). It is believed that 'violence between intimate partners is multidetermined and caused by a combination of risk factors rather than any single factor operating in isolation' (Ridley and Feldman 2003: 157). These include excessive alcohol/substance use, low economic status, depleted self esteem; low assertiveness, experiencing and/or witnessing parental violence and marital conflict (see v 1995). Family violence researchers suggest that 'women's violence to a male partner cannot be interpreted as 'self-defence' as women are equally likely to initiate violence' (Stets and Straus 1990: 161 cited in Dobash and Dobash 2004: 327).

Most studies measure interpersonal violence through the use of the CTS (see Archer 2000). CTS scores illustrate self-reported incidences of physical and psychological aggression, sexual coercion and resulting injury (Archer and Graham-Kevan 2003). CTS findings typically reflect frequency rather than severity. 'With regard to the frequency of couple violence in 'violent' families, we are fortunate to have data using the same data collection instrument with survey samples and shelter samples' (Johnson 1995: 286). However, because gender symmetry findings are taken from studies that use the CTS, conclusions that men and women are equally abusive are premature (Gormley 2005; Johnson 1995; Johnson 2006). The CTS has the potential to cloud gender differences in outcome severity (Gormley 2005). A more accurate interpretation might be that both sexes report similar frequencies of a range of acts deemed 'abusive' (Dobash and Dobash 2004). The CTS fails to determine whether the perpetrator's objective was to control and manipulate, or whether the victim endured indirect, non-visible injuries (Gormley 2005).

2.5 Violence against women research

In contrast to the family violence argument, feminist advocates fear that a focus framed upon 'spousal abuse' will avert attention from unequal patriarchal relationships, the chief source of violence against women (Kurz, 1993). Examining female perpetrated domestic violence has been described as 'victim-blaming' (Kurz 1993) as it is widely understood that violence is employed as a reaction to men's violence against them (Dobash and Dobash 2004; Farrell 1996). Feminist researchers argue that the data based on CTS studies are misleading and deceptive (see Dobash and Dobash, 1992); the CTS 'fails to convey the wider context of violent events and the exercise of power within intimate relationships' (Dobash and Dobash, 2004: 328). It is assumed that family violence research promotes and strengthens existing widespread, erroneous gendered stereotypes, and the conviction that women cause their own victimisation by provoking and aggravating male partners (Kurz, 1993). It has been suggested that feminists perceive women as incapable of violence or, if violent, as 'victims' rather than 'perpetrators' (Gilbert 2002). Pearson (1997) argues that women should not be regarded as powerless and incapable of violence. 'How do we argue that we can be aggressive on every count...but never in a manner that does harm? How do we affirm ourselves to be as complex, desirous and independent as men without conceding the antisocial potential in those qualities?' (Pearson 1997: 32)

In reality, it is not adequate that feminism concerns itself exclusively with men's supremacy and governance over women. The power that some women have over others and the similarities and differences that women share with men has to be borne in mind (Letherby 2003). A 'broad theoretical perspective that considers the interactions of social, socio-economic, racial, ethnic, historical, institutional as well as individual variables in women's violence would provide a better understanding of domestic violence' (Gilbert 2002: 5). This is the framework that I will work towards in my own research. It is too simplistic to assume that all women identify with each other on the basis of gender alone. Women's lives are contradictory; gender is only one source of power or oppression. It is not productive to assume that gender can explain all behaviours. Butler (1990) notes that 'being a man' and 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some

other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses' (Butler 1993: 126 cited in Skeggs 1997: 101). Foucault (1977) was extremely critical of the notion that power stems from one source; he argued that such a perspective acts to obscure the myriad ways that power functions (Gilbert 2002). 'Multiple systems of oppression frame everyone's lives and everyone's life is subject to varying amounts of penalty and privilege' (Letherby 2003: 46). The consequence of focusing on gender alone is to strip away and disregard other relevant aspects of interpersonal violence. 'If one voice, or paradigm, dominates then there is real danger that we end up just speaking to ourselves. This can lead to a form of tunnel vision whereby some problems are explored exhaustively while others are not even perceived' (Sparks 1992: 48 cited in Pringle 2005: 257). In reality, while social research needs to be subject to assessment for 'male' bias, 'feminist' bias is also of danger. Indeed, 'feminists' are somewhat to blame for preserving some of the myths and inaccurate beliefs that society continues to hold about women (Pearson 1997). This can be evidenced by the fact that voluntary adult prostitution in modern Western societies remains a contested topic for 'feminists'. 'The classic ways by which sex work is often understood either posits that commercialised sexuality indicates victimhood and vulnerability *or* that it is valid work and meaningful sexual expression for seller and buyer alike' (Rickard 2001: 111). In reality, these are seldom absolute for sex workers, those who conduct research, provide services or generate policies (Rickard 2001). Foucault (1977) suggests that a multilayered discourse of violence is needed to explain society's perceptions of gender and of aggressive women. At present, the perceived 'otherness of women has, historically, allowed the metaphoric woman to stand in for a wide and contradictory array of qualities, values and meaning' (Shapiro 1996: 4 cited in Pringle 2005: 257).

2.6 Sampling strategies in feminist and family violence data

Johnson (1995; 2006) argues that there are four main categories of intimate partner violence, and that the failure of research to differentiate between them has resulted in a domestic violence literature that is largely indistinguishable and inaccurate. The categories of domestic violence illustrated by Johnson (situational couple violence, intimate terrorism, violent resistance and mutual violent control) are characterised in terms of the control motives of the aggressive member(s) of the couple (Johnson 1995; 2006; Graham-Kevan

and Archer 2003). Johnson maintains that the categories have distinct causes and consequences, different modes of development and that they require different forms of intervention and policy involvement. Differences in sampling strategies are seen to be the major source of apparent discrepancies between feminist movement and family violence data. In general, 'feminist' studies that reveal a predominance of male perpetration and female victimisation rely solely upon agency data (courts, police, hospitals and shelters), while research that demonstrate gender symmetry involve supposed 'representative', large scale, quantitative samples (Archer 2000). Johnson (1995; 2006) contends that both of these sampling frames are heavily biased; 'feminist' research through its use of partial, one-sided sampling frames, and family violence research through refusals. Whereas the shortfalls of agency sampling frames are generally taken to be evident (see Straus 1993), 'representative', large-scale sample surveys have erroneously been assumed to be unbiased (Archer 2000). Indeed, it is argued that the two approaches may uncover distinct forms of intimate partner violence, differing in terms of underlying motivational dynamics (Krahe *et al.* 2005).

Most academic and political debates on female violence are examinations of sex or gender differences in aggression (see Bjorkqvist 1994). However, it is incorrect to centre arguments simply on notions of gender and physical strength rather than on the intrinsic beliefs and predisposition of individuals to use violence as an interrelational tactic (Gilbert 2002). The context and nature of the conflict needs to be taken into account; indeed, it is not helpful or constructive to question whether one sex is more aggressive than the other (Dobash and Dobash 2004; Gilbert 2002; Pizzey *et al.* 2000). Context has an effect on an individual's perceptions, beliefs and experiences of domestic violence; it also has a bearing on the causes and consequences of interpersonal conflicts. However, as a rule, research has either examined domestic violence without distinguishing among contexts, or focus has been framed solely upon particular isolated contexts (see Archer 2000; Graham-Kevan and Archer 2005; Straus and Gelles 1995). A comparative assessment of contexts is necessary to develop, explore and augment our understanding of female violence. The notion of violence must be regarded as shifting and interchangeable; it is imperative that definitions of violence and research are wide-ranging and in-depth if we are to move away from one-sided, simplistic portrayals of domestic violence (Gilbert 2002). 'Aggressive behaviour' may be multidetermined; encouraged by an assortment of perspectives, beliefs and

emotions (see Archer and Haigh; Brown and Gilligan 1992). 'Victims', 'perpetrators' and observers may have different standpoints on any given act of aggression (Gilbert 2002). Responses of one party in relation to the action of the other are situational and individual; they are centred in social and cultural time and place bound frameworks (Lloyd 1995). However, it is not only the character and nature of the violent act, but also the characteristics of the aggressor that may influence responses (Lloyd 1995).

2.7 The causes and consequences of female perpetrated violence

In reality, there are few social, cultural and demographic characteristics that define risk groups for interpersonal violence. Poverty or patriarchy, alcohol or aggression; the causes of intimate partner violence have long been contested by social scientists (see Jewkes 2002). Underlying the controversy is an inescapable problem; 'evidence for causation of intimate partner violence is weak. Measurement of intimate partner violence has posed a challenge – definitions and constructions of violence are difficult to measure, especially across cultures' (Jewkes 2002: 1423). Caution needs to be employed when thinking in terms of origins, roots and causes of domestic violence. While it is feasible to analyse individual causal explanations of violence, the search for a 'final' cause may be ineffective (Gormley 2005). In reality, wide-ranging explanations need to be treated with great care; it has been argued that they can be applied to take moral or political responsibility and accountability from women, and can be used as 'excuses' for violence (Cook 1997).

2.8 Age and violence

Age has frequently been recognised to be a risk factor for violence, with a greater risk ascribed to youth (Jewkes 2002). In 2004 the peak age of offending was seventeen for males and fifteen for females (Walker *et al.* 2009). Studies of dating violence typically uncover higher frequencies of physical aggression, particularly in adolescents, than found in long-term relationships with older couples (Frieze 2005: 232). However, in other research, a causal relationship with age of either partner has not been found (see Martin *et al.* 1999). Equally, age at marriage is not an associated factor (Martin *et al.* 1999). Some of these disparities may be made clear by issues such as study design and participant reluctance to divulge experiences and beliefs in research settings. It must also be borne in mind that there has been comparatively little research published to guide the field in

focusing upon barriers to help seeking for older women who experience and perpetrate domestic violence (see Beaulaurier *et al.* 2007).

2.9 Poverty and violence

Poverty and its associated strains and anxieties are seen to be significant contributing factors to intimate partner violence. Although violence occurs in all socioeconomic groups, it is more recurrent and severe in lower income groups across such diverse settings as the USA, Nicaragua and India (Jewkes 2002). As socio-economic inequality has been revealed to be a central causal factor in other types of violence, 'it might be important in explaining differences in prevalence of intimate partner violence' (Jewkes 2002: 1424).

2.10 Alcohol and violence

Alcohol consumption is associated with increased risk of all forms of interpersonal violence (Foran and O'Leary 2008). Heavy alcohol consumption is consistently associated with intimate partner violence (Frieze 2005). Alcohol is thought to decrease inhibitions and cloud judgement. However, 'research on the social anthropology of alcohol drinking suggests that connections between violence and drinking are socially learnt and not universal' (Jewkes 2002: 1426).

2.11 Violence as a learnt social behaviour

Social researchers have long considered violence to be a learnt social behaviour for both men and women. Observing parental aggression has been found to be correlated with domestic violence in numerous studies (see Bookwala *et al.* 1992). It is argued that violent experiences in childhood teach children that violence is 'normal' and accepted in particular circumstances. In this way, it is claimed that men learn to employ violence and women learn to endure it, or at least tolerate aggressive behaviour (Jewkes 2002). Cross cultural studies of intimate partner abuse suggest that violence is much more recurrent in societies where conflict situations and political struggles are rife (see Levinson 1989).

Campbell (1997) contends that 'women's aggression looks and feels different from men's...Both sexes see an intimate connection between aggression and control, but for women, aggression is the *failure* of self-control, while for men it is the *imposing* of control over others' (Campbell 1997: 1). It is argued that female violence stems from a failure to

contain and regulate emotion; it is a release of accumulated tension (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Busch and Rosenberg 2004). I believe that Campbell's analysis is sweeping and too simplistic; the categories 'expressive' and 'experimental' are too basic, it is impossible to label and pigeonhole individuals, especially into such a distinct grouping. In reality, the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are interchangeable; an individual regardless of gender may be both 'victim' and 'perpetrator', or may even change from one to another during the course of a relationship. The terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are transient categories. We have to move way from labelling these women as either 'victims' or 'perpetrators' in order to obtain a much broader estimate of domestic violence. There has to be a better way of understanding domestic violence than theories of learned helplessness and battered women's syndrome (Rhatigan *et al.* 2006). All simplistic categories of violence should be reflexively challenged; findings should not be compressed into any specific category. The privileging of one model over another is very problematic, and may not be a part of the participants own understandings of domestic violence.

2.12 Emancipation of women and the ladette culture

As women attain equality, and the same rights and responsibilities as men in late modern society, it is argued that their conduct becomes increasingly violent and conspicuous (Gilbert 2002). However, this proclamation presumes a simple, singular reductive form of causation (Gilbert 2002). It also incorrectly assumes that female violent crime is increasing (Walby and Allen 2004), and that women are now financially emancipated, despite the 'feminisation of poverty' (Gilbert 2002). In accord with numerous media reports, it is maintained that the 'ladette' phenomenon is an invention of women's increased equality with men (Jackson and Tinkler 2007). Research indicates that in contrast to any emancipation arguments, 'the judgements of women...do not arise because these girls are becoming more emancipated. Rather, this judgement arises because individuals still apply narrow notions of male-focused behaviour as the standard for what is right and good for women' (Artz 1999: 201). The 'ladette' is perceived as operating outside the traditional 'feminine' domestic sphere, overshadowing space once considered the principle domain of men (Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). In reality, 'there is a recurring amnesia about the youth of each generation which means that today's youths are always perceived as shockingly different from those of yesteryear' (Jackson and Tinkler 2007: 251) . 'Ladettes' are

depicted as pleasure-seeking and self-indulgent, driven by alcohol-fuelled hedonism (Day *et al.* 2004; Guise and Gill 2007). Conduct ascribed to 'ladettes' are associated with 'unrespectable' working class lifestyles (Skeggs 1997). The categorisation of the working classes into 'rough' and 'respectable' has a long tradition (see Jackson and Tinkler 2007). To be 'unrespectable' is to have insufficient legitimacy or moral authority (Skeggs 1997). However, similar to society's constructions of the 'violent woman', differences between representations of 'ladettes' uncover a marked lack of agreement regarding definitions (Jackson and Tinkler 2007).

Aggressive 'bad' girls and women have always existed in society, with a pursuing media keen to flaunt and parade their 'deviant' behaviours (Chesney-Lind 2002). However, on the whole, these media constructions and representations typically do not mirror the complexity of violent women's behaviours and experiences (Andrews and Bontana 1994; Babcock *et al.* 2003; Berrington and Honkatukia 2002; Lloyd 1995; Morrissey 2003). In reality there is little substantial empirical evidence to imply that women and girls are 'closing the gender gap in violence' (Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008: 29). In the face of research and statistics that suggest women partake in small amounts of violence, media constructions of aggressive women and girls are increasing, and are consequently working to influence the policing of women and obscure the trend in arrests (see Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008; Martin 1997; Walklate 2008). Public apprehension surrounds violent women mainly due to an unremitting barrage of media images of 'immoral' women and girls who are weekly awarded Anti-Social Behavioural Orders. The increase in women being arrested for violent offences has raised alarm among academics and the criminal justice system (Miller and Meloy 2006). It could be argued that the arrests are a result of stringent policies and moral panics rather than a reflection of actual increases in women's aggression (Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008; Finn *et al.* 2004; Martin 1997; Miller and Meloy 2006).

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

This chapter provides a critical account of the methodology used in this small-scale study around women who perpetrate violence towards intimates, acquaintances and strangers. A non-probability, purposive sample of female perpetrators was principally taken from two sources in West Yorkshire: a women's anger management counselling group (S.T.O.P), and a women's centre which provides wide-ranging support for females with a history of offending or at risk of offending (the Together Women Project). Using qualitative data collected from anger management group observations and in-depth interviews with both female perpetrators and key informants who have come into contact with violent women, a 'feminist' approach was adopted to afford a voice for female perpetrators, whose perspectives and experiences are often overlooked. Utilising an earlier study (Williams 2006) as a pilot, this research was built upon in order to generate research contacts within West Yorkshire and develop methodological techniques.

3.1 Negotiating access

As a result of an MA study (Williams 2006) and previous voluntary work, I had formed a close relationship with S.T.O.P before the research began. I felt embedded in the field and had attained the trust and confidence of the Director. Consequently I was able to use this association to draw on S.T.O.P's resources and contacts in order to gain the consensus and support of key informants, such as Together Women staff, Erin Pizzey and others who have facilitated female perpetrator groups across West Yorkshire. All key informants were either approached directly by me or their contact details forwarded to me by gatekeepers. A 'research bargain' (Burgess 1984) was embarked upon with the centres; their support and assistance was gained in exchange for my voluntary services. Administrative tasks were performed including answering telephone calls, data entry, photocopying and filing. At Together Women I attended a facilitator training programme, and for a period of six weeks I co-facilitated the women's 'Anger Management' self-help group. During this time I also took the opportunity to design and develop one anger management group session. Volunteering at both organisations assured gatekeepers of my trustworthiness and genuine interest in the issue of female violence. As a result I had access to the informal and formal contexts of S.T.O.P and Together Women, and had free use of the interview rooms, telephone, internet, photocopier and the numerous books and articles available there.

Together Women even arranged and paid for a client to be driven to the centre specifically to be interviewed. Employing these facilities enabled me to adapt into rather than direct and manipulate the research setting. My close association with S.T.O.P and Together Women may have increased participation, as I was able to use the relationships already formed to obtain trust and possibly gain a better understanding of key informants and the perpetrators themselves.

Due to the delicate, sensitive nature of this research, access had to be renegotiated and re-managed throughout. Gatekeepers at both S.T.O.P and Together Women had a tight control over the choice of women I interviewed. Owing to gatekeeper's reservations concerning confidentiality and client's privacy, I was not allowed access to group member databases and customer contact details. Instead, the centres compiled a list of old and new female clients they thought would be interested in participating. Often, it was the case that both Together Women and S.T.O.P insisted that they contact the women first before passing client details on to me. In effect, I was very much dependent upon gatekeepers; they vetted research participants and controlled the direction of the study. As a result, serious ethical issues were raised as it could be argued that the gatekeepers were acting in their own interests by perhaps selecting women who were considered 'good for research', who would paint the centres in a positive light. In order to reduce this bias I erected posters and distributed leaflets advertising my research throughout the centres and on the S.T.O.P website, so that clients and non-clients could contact me directly. In addition, posters were distributed throughout the Unity Housing Association (which works to meet the housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities throughout Leeds). Additionally, snowball sampling was used as interviewees, anger management group attendees and key informants were asked if they knew of any friends, family and/or acquaintances who would be interested in participating. In a bid to separate myself from the centres somewhat and avoid over association, I introduced myself as a researcher from Leeds University. I tried to be as honest as possible regarding my own roles and capabilities within the centres; I could provide no counselling or advice.

3.2 Participant observation: notes from the field

S.T.O.P operated an open enrolment policy whereby women could start the programme any week rather than wait until a new group formed, thus affording the opportunity to

observe a larger number of women than might have otherwise been possible. This open enrolment strategy also meant that women were at various stages of the 'treatment' process and had a range of experiences with the criminal justice system. As a result, the women were able to raise various issues and offer different insights into the weekly discussions. The self-help group observations offered the opportunity to analyse the women and social context as a whole, while in-depth interviews provided a detailed investigation of individual perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. By combining participant observation with interviews and visual methods, the data from each method was used to help shed light on the other. The women employed the self-help counselling groups to utilise new knowledges and understandings of incidents they had largely experienced individually. It is important to note that in all probability these socially shared understandings, 'norms' and values may have been at odds with women's individual standpoints (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). In telling such multi-vocal narratives, member's personal stories and outlooks were shaped by the group (Humphreys 2000). Nonetheless, group attendees shared similar background characteristics and were on familiar terms. As a result, the group sessions may have given rise to private, in depth discussion; its supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere possibly encouraged self-report. One group member in particular was very candid and open during the sessions, as she confessed that she had threatened to commit suicide several years earlier by jumping off a bridge whilst holding a child in her arms. I later learned that this information was not given to S.T.O.P group facilitators, and certainly was not shared during the interview. However, the themes and topics that emerged from group sessions often formed the foundation of the in-depth interviews. The interviews sometimes allowed for a follow up of 'interesting' subject matter that was raised during group sessions. In doing this, respondents own meaning frames were respected and preserved (Hollway and Jefferson 2000).

Reliability and validity are problematical concepts in observational approaches and in-depth interviewing (Mason 2002). The voluntary nature of the centres meant that the size and character of the groups were never fixed; women were free to come and go as they pleased. This may have caused ethical difficulties and possibly threatened potential research associations with female perpetrators (Booth and Booth 1994). In reality, it was not possible to calculate the extent and success of the women's shared understandings during group sessions. For example, listeners sometimes interjected stories which possibly

changed their content and/or structure midstream. As a result, the group environment shaped individual narratives. The women's experiences were also framed by the meanings provided by S.T.O.P and Together Women (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). Reading the compulsory 'Be Safe: a self-help guide for perpetrators of domestic abuse/anger management' booklet which accompanies S.T.O.P 'treatment', the women were brought into close contact with the ideas of the centre. Many respondents were facing child custody issues, three women had children on the Child Protection register and two interviewees were on probation. Consequently, the women were likely to be anxious to comply with the centres, and bring their narratives more fully into harmony with the centres' ideas (see Chapter 8 for a further discussion). Interviewing women in these institutional environments (where respondents would likely experience negative attitudes towards violent thoughts and behaviours) in all probability affected the way stories were told, and the images some women presented of their lives, both during group sessions and in-depth interviews. Stories were possibly edited and rewritten; respondents may have chosen to be guarded about the nature of their activities by suppressing incriminating, upsetting, dishonourable or private aspects of their lives (Miller 2001). The anger management sessions were artificial constructs, far removed from the 'reality' of violence for many participants (Gadd 2004). Indeed these out-of-context stories often 'are not completely accurate and may present a more exaggerated, glamorous or smooth picture than is warranted' (Agar 1977 cited in Miller 2001: 33). The women managed their identities; justifying, excusing and accounting for their behaviours in socially plausible ways. The methods employed in this study explore situated knowledge (Andrews 2002).

In this research setting, women's accounts and definitions of violence were the result of their interaction with the centres and with the research itself (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). Many of the perpetrators interviewed were very familiar with the criminal justice system, and as a result both perpetrators and key informants were orientated towards thinking and talking about violence in advance of each research encounter. In this light, all narratives were viewed as socially constructed within the setting; they do not represent a 'truth' which objectively reveals the reality of female violence. In spite of this, respondent's narratives provide a wealth of fascinating knowledge; they highlight some of the processes through which this sample of female perpetrators create and perform violent

identities. Indeed, this research is interested in exploring women's understandings and experiences of their own violence, incorporating what perpetrators say, and what they fail to say.

Fig. 1: Number of respondents included in the study

Total number of S.T.O.P clients observed during fieldwork period	23
Number of newcomers who joined S.T.O.P during fieldwork period	16
Number of S.T.O.P clients observed who attended one session only	5
Number of S.T.O.P clients interviewed	11
Number of Together Women clients interviewed	3
Number of women interviewed who had never attended anger management group sessions	4
Number of key informants interviewed	11
Total number of respondents included in the study	41

3.3 The interview process

In spite of the fact that qualitative studies have an unclear status in a scientific discipline that highlights the need for data to meet external validity, interviewing in depth permits a greater sensitivity and profundity to narratives (Lee 1999). It is my epistemological assumption that to comprehend the complexities of domestic violence and violence as a whole, it is vital to hear directly from those who have experienced it. Individual research accounts give the reader an insight into the personal, emotional and biographically specific. Semi-structured research techniques were employed in this study to access women's experiences in ways that external accounts and objective evidence could not (Firth and Kitzinger 1998; Oakley 1981). The aim was to facilitate open expression of respondent's perspectives (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007); not to gather 'pure' data that was free from bias. Detailed descriptions of individual experiences were utilised to reduce the contradictions that currently surround the issue of female perpetrated violence (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). In line with 'feminist' research, semi structured interviews were conducted in an open, exploratory way, rather than linear and chronological (Oakley 1981). Interviewees were invited to expand themes in ways that were important and relevant to them. The flexible nature and semi structured style of the interviews enabled respondents to influence the direction of the discussion.

For reasons of convenience, interviews with group attendees were mostly conducted after group sessions. This meant that the likelihood of women's attendance would be increased and the events of the group session would be fresh in the participant's mind. To facilitate talk, events and aspects discussed in the group sessions were echoed back to them in a manner that prompted an expansion of thought. To document the in-depth interviews, an audio-recorder was decided upon, as note taking would distract participants and curtail the quality of data. In spite of the fact that audio-recording imposes numerous constraints, transcriptions demonstrate accountability and are a testimony to the research. In addition, verbatim quotations and excerpts from field diaries allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the interaction and interview process. With such a sensitive topic, audio-recording may have discouraged the reporting of open accounts (Cotterill 1992). Although recording was a necessity, I found that it did not conform to the 'feminist' tradition and the notion of a 'conversation with a purpose'. Indeed, its formal presence constrained the

interview process, and made one interviewee in particular very nervous. The quality of tape recording could not be assured, as I found to my alarm upon hearing some interviews; thick accents and poor quality recordings were often a constraint. To overcome this problem I made notes instantly after the interview and transcribed immediately so that errors were detected while the interview was still fresh in memory (Booth and Booth 1994).

During the initial fieldwork period, two interviews were conducted with each participant. The second interview was carried out with the aim of probing beyond the interviewee's defences. I found that relatively formal, unspecific discussions transformed into private accounts as the interviews progressed, in particular during the second interview. The women began to discuss their lives in ways that demonstrated a high level of trust, and the conversation often diverged onto deeply personal, delicate topics. As the women's confidence and trust developed over time, participants adjusted their accounts to unveil more about themselves. By remaining involved with the participants and their constructions of meaning, the women's attitudes and behaviours were slowly unveiled. However, time and money constraints meant that the research ultimately had to be based on single rather than repeat interviews, with only 'interesting' participants being interviewed twice. Ultimately the length of each interview was guided by the sizable amount of material collected and the participant's willingness to share their stories in depth. Although the single interview is less taxing, traumatic and encroaching for the respondent and S.T.O.P, it prohibited any attempt to involve some interviewees more closely in the research process over a longer period (Lee 1999).

3.4 Mapping time

Timelines were used to help perpetrators communicate in meaningful ways about their experiences; to negotiate and translate diverse understandings of time (Suddaby and Landau 1998). During the interview situation, the women were asked to construct a timeline of their lives and reflect upon what they had written. Initially, this visual method was considered to be empowering for participants, since they had the creative opportunity to explore their lives as part of a study that was interested in what they had to say (Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006). This approach was trusting and optimistic about respondent's ability to generate interesting theories and observations themselves. However,

the idea that research studies can 'empower' participants is perhaps sometimes over-ambitious (Adler and Adler 2003; Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006). Nevertheless, the use of timelines did hold value for participants, for example Jane talked of 'how participation had changed her way of thinking about her experiences' (Field Diary 01.10.2008). I cannot assume that this research necessarily empowered the women I worked with, nor did it contribute to their consciousness raising. At the very most, I can conclude that some women felt pleased that they were being listened to, that they were able to share their experiences and that these were taken seriously (Meth and Malaza 2003). I found that the timelines touched upon very interesting and revealing subjects that were not mentioned verbally later on, possibly because some topics were too raw, too painful to discuss. For instance Jane noted on the timeline that she had an abortion at a young age (see Appendix G), but showed distinct reluctance to discuss this subject in any detail during the interview. However, in reality the visual was not central to my research, as conversations often veered from the timelines, and comments were not always added. Nevertheless, this method served as an excellent tool to promote discussion, even for those with learning difficulties who did not want to record their lives in writing. This was true for Anne who was Dyslexic. During the interview, she pointed towards a line on blank paper to indicate and highlight important events at different stages of her life.

3.5 Sampling strategy

Female perpetrators

Due to the fact that many violent women remain hidden; obtaining a true random sample was unfeasible and impractical. It was necessary to compromise with the ideal and use a non-probability, purposive sampling frame. It was hoped that the reliability and dependability of the study would be increased by the fact that the research was primarily based in two women's centres in West Yorkshire. Convenience, access and geographic proximity were the main reasons for choosing S.T.O.P and the Together Women Project. However, through accessing women who attend anger management counselling, I am aware that I am obtaining the experiences of potentially the most distressed and 'serious' violent offenders. To include women referred to perpetrator support groups severely restricts generalisation and suitability, and results may not be indicative or representative of the entire population of violent women. To help offset this concern, snowball sampling

was used to interview perpetrators who had not attended anger management counselling group sessions. In reality the sample of violent women was derived from three separate sources: three interviewees were obtained through snowball sampling (a niece of a S.T.O.P key informant, friend of a S.T.O.P key informant and friend of an interviewee), one respondent was acquired through the Unity Housing Association, and all other interviewees were attained with the help of both gatekeepers and posters erected at S.T.O.P and Together Women. Two women who were obtained from snowball sampling and the interviewee from the Unity Housing Association had never experienced anger management group counselling. The fourth interviewee acquired from snowball sampling had attended anger management classes in school 'for a week' but this had proved to be a negative experience and served to 'annoy' her 'even more'. All other interviewees had anger management counselling group experience, apart from one woman who identified herself as a perpetrator, but was attending the S.T.O.P women's support group to help those experiencing domestic violence. In spite of this, snowball sampling had limited success, with individuals who 'seemed interested in theory, but very apprehensive to come forward' (Field Diary, 26.11.2008). The main reasons given for not wanting to participate were a lack of time and the belief that it would be 'very difficult to talk about such intimate issues with a complete stranger' (Field Diary, 26.11.2008).

Key informants

Interviews were conducted with eleven key informants: two of which were co-facilitating the S.T.O.P women's anger management group sessions at the time of being interviewed. Four key informants had previously facilitated the S.T.O.P women's group sessions but were now focusing their attentions on male anger management 'treatment' and other projects involving drug rehabilitation. The Funding Manager at S.T.O.P was interviewed. Three Together Women key workers also participated and discussed their experiences of working with violent women and female offenders as a whole. The writer and campaigner Erin Pizzey, who famously started one of the first women's refuges in the UK (Pizzey *at al.* 2000) was also interviewed. Most interviews were conducted on the premises of S.T.O.P or Together Women. However for reasons of convenience and geographical proximity, one interview was conducted at the private residence of a key informant, and the informal interview conducted with Erin Pizzey took place over the telephone.

Although increasing the rate of response, this research was conducted in an artificial situation, where the problem of domestic violence was separated from the context of the women's relationships and their lives. The ethnic backgrounds of the interviewees were not diverse. This is possibly linked to the fact that cultural differences affect help seeking, and the fact that all posters and resources used to advertise both S.T.O.P and Together Women were in English and these may have worked to alienate individuals. The majority of respondents came from poor, working class backgrounds. Thirteen interviewees were in receipt of some sort of benefit, and eight women were unemployed. In all probability, the fact that S.T.O.P group sessions were held mid-afternoon on a weekday may have restricted the attendance of women with certain fixed commitments, for instance child care and employment. All interviewees were heterosexual. Despite observing group sessions where one homosexual woman was present, there was no opportunity to probe into the ways that violence may have shaped her romantic relationships. Although aware of the research, this group member's attendance at S.T.O.P was sporadic and her disinterest in participating meant that it was not possible to interview her. The lack of diversity in this sample of women means that this study was unable to gain an insight into the similarities and differences female perpetrators share with those from different backgrounds. Participant's reports of violence were not corroborated. This study did not follow women over time. This potentially oversimplified the phenomenon and provided limited, sometimes biased narratives.

3.6 Analysis and coding techniques

All interviews were transcribed in full and carefully checked against audio-recordings. Names were changed to pseudonyms, and data was managed in NVivo 8. As part of the analytical process, my thinking and interpretation occurred through the transcribing stages and writing process. I was inextricably implicated in every step of the research process and made detailed records of my own participation, reactions and experiences in a Field Diary. These records were used as an important data source for analysis. Influenced by Widdowfield (2000) I made the story of my own participation heard, alongside that of the participants. Field notes included the alternative explanations I had considered, the struggles, defeats and triumphs of the research process.

In NVivo 8 separate folders were created for different data sets; folders were generated for interviews with key informants, violent women who attended anger management sessions and those who had never attended anger management. A different folder was also created to help organise field notes. Data analysis included constant comparison, memo writing and theory building. All annotations and memos were dated in order to map the analytical process and account for all decisions. During the course of fieldwork, issues and themes were identified and coded with more precision and new categories were developed. Codes were uncoded and recoded. NVivo provided a flexible way of working; a tool to develop ideas beyond the original themes. The next stage involved taking each code in turn and identify the different ways of talking about the theme, noting similarities and contradictions to discover the extent to which the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of respondents varied. Throughout, efforts were made to remain faithful to the women's stories. From this, discursive patterns were generated and existing literature referred to in order to develop a theoretical account of these, before selecting another theme and repeating the process (Day *et al.* 2003).

3.7 Ethical and practical issues

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, asking respondents to disclose upsetting, painful experiences undermines attempts to evade harm, prevent exploitation and guarantee confidentiality (Meth and Malaza 2003). Asking sensitive questions has implications not only relating to the exploration of participants' vulnerabilities for the sake of career advancement (Burman *et al.* 2001), but also in terms of the personal, emotional, psychological and social effects of participants disclosing painful or personal incidents. Throughout the study, moral and ethical dilemmas were reduced by a greater sensitivity to women's rights, privacy and anonymity. Asking women to participate in such a study when many would have been abused, exploited and mistreated in the past meant that I had to embark on this research with subtlety and prudence (Booth and Booth 1994). By formally providing an informed consent contract and information sheet, respondents were given a full explanation of the extent and nature of their own participation. Consent was gained directly from the research participants themselves, although I considered the interests and requirements of the gatekeepers and the centres. Since the relationships between participants and gatekeepers may continue after the study, I was cautious not to

jeopardise existing relationships or affect the therapeutic assistance provided by the centres. Obtaining informed consent required telling potential participants what involvement in the research entailed; yet this was in itself problematic. An important aim of the research was to unpack women's 'own' meanings and definitions, for example, of what they considered 'counted' as violence, and where violence 'fitted' into their lives. Hence, while I needed to explain the research and why it was being done, this had to be achieved without pre-defining the 'problem' or leading women to give the responses they thought I was anticipating (Burman *et al.* 2001).

In line with the BSA (2002) Statement of Ethical Practice, I was modest, candid and realistic in the guarantees I gave when informing consent. It was important to be responsive to the fact that while the 'educated, literate and aware know that they can refuse, the less educated defer to and comply with the social researchers who approach them' (Carlson 1967 cited in Homan 1991: 95). The fact that a small number of interviewees and group attendees seemed extremely vulnerable at the time of data collection raises serious concerns regarding consent. As some participants were very poor readers or had learning difficulties, the language and layout of the consent form was simple, straightforward and non-judgemental. Before each interview, I talked to the women individually, going through the main points of the research and answering questions. Interviewees were warned through the information sheet that the questions asked would be of an intrusive and personal nature. Despite running the danger of fixing the boundaries of the research too firmly, the consent and information forms helped to make the interviews less demanding as the women had already indicated they wanted to see me and they in turn, had some idea of what I desired of them (Booth and Booth 1996).

In this prolonged fieldwork situation (see Fig. 2: p. 33), informed consent was not a 'once and for all' process; it was subject to renegotiation over time. Ethical issues formed a crucial, ongoing role throughout, as participants were awarded full confidentiality during interviews. Fieldwork and reflexive diaries were utilised throughout as pragmatic self-critical methods of reassessing ethical and methodological issues. This investigation was conducted at the pace of the women themselves; the women were invited to determine where and when the next interview took place. I did not press any of the participants to discuss issues that they did not wish to disclose, and invited respondents to disregard

questions they felt unhappy divulging. I assured participants that they could be given copies of their own interview transcripts, to allow interviewees to alter their content, critically re-examine and to supply additional information. However, none of the women chose to take this opportunity. Interviewees were advised prior to questioning that all information disclosed was confidential, unless they indicated that there was risk of harm to an individual, in which case this would need to be reported to S.T.O.P or Together Women. This exception may well have curtailed what the participants disclosed in group sessions and interviews, particularly of present or planned experiences/acts of violence.

Fig. 2: Number of hours spent in the field

S.T.O.P group observations	23 hours 20 minutes
Interviewing S.T.O.P group members/past members	15 hours
Interviewing Together Women clients	3 hours
Interviewing those who had never attended S.T.O.P and Together Women anger management group sessions	4 hours
Interviewing key informants	10 hours 30 minutes
Volunteering at Together Women and training	22 hours 30 minutes

Volunteering at S.T.O.P	25 hours
Total hours spent in the field	103 hours 20 minutes

Like Finch (1984), I felt that participants revealed very private aspects of their lives in return for flimsy assurances of confidentiality. In reality the very effectiveness of the techniques used left respondents open to exploitation. With gendered stereotypes and mostly negative reactions to violent women in the press 'I was very aware that aspects of my data could be discussed in such a way as potentially to undermine the interests of these women' (Finch 1984: 83). Working with a small number of participants from two centres in West Yorkshire, I knew subjects would recognise themselves or possibly be recognised in the final product. All identifiable characteristics were removed from transcriptions and publications. Furthermore, most interviews took place in 'counselling rooms' provided either on the premises of S.T.O.P or Together Women. Only the study participants and I were in the room during the interview, while group facilitators and key workers were nearby, they were unable to hear the conversations. Upon the request of a respondent who had never attended anger management sessions, one interview took place at a private residence. The choice of interview locations reduced the cost of the study and allowed intimacy and privacy throughout, as interviews were held in a familiar atmosphere for the majority of interviewees, away from counsellors and other group members. As a result, psychological risk was decreased, as counsellors were available after most interviews for respondents to discuss the complex issues and feelings that may have been aroused. The close presence of counsellors during interviews also served as a safety net should any respondent display threatening, violent behaviour. During all interviews held at Together Women I was provided with an alarm which would summon the help of key workers or the police should I need it. However, this safety measure was never utilised during interviews. For those participants who were recruited outside S.T.O.P and Together Women, I had no understanding of participant's offending history, no knowledge of their past or whether they posed any danger. Therefore, during the interview at one respondent's private

residence, it was necessary to notify two friends of the address and time of the meeting to help ensure my safety.

During group sessions, no attempt was made to record or make notes; I acted merely as a complete observer and sympathetic listener. For reasons of practicality, the women were asked to consent verbally to my presence in the group sessions. Time limitations often constrained my ability to fully explain details of the study. On occasion women would only attend one group session (see Fig. 1: p. 25), and would never be informed of the full features of my study. I often faced moral and ethical dilemmas as to whether to include their stories in my research. I was reluctant to talk about my research too much, fearful that if one woman did not agree to my presence, then I would no longer be able to observe the group as a whole. This lack of control over how the study was presented and explained to the group may have affected responses. There was the danger that I may have been too closely identified with authority and the centres itself. As the women heavily relied upon the facilities provided by S.T.O.P and Together Women, its authority and power may have swayed consent at many levels. The notion of freely informed consent may not have been clear-cut here. I imagine that to some extent the women felt obliged to participate in order to assist the centres in some way. Like Dingwell (1980: 878 cited in Tisdall 2003: 139) a hierarchy of consent was formed. Once key informants had agreed to participate, clients possibly felt unable to withhold consent. Group members may have found it difficult to refuse due to the fact that facilitators were present; the women may have perceived themselves to be at risk of 'official disfavour'. By obtaining consent and presenting myself in this manner, serious ethical questions were raised.

Leaving the field potentially held many ethical problems. However, this was negotiated with counsellors and I gradually stopped attending the sessions when saturation point was reached, and found that many of the women who I had interviewed were no longer receiving counselling at the centres. Towards the end of my experience in the ethnographic field I was asked to volunteer information about myself and participate in one or two group sessions. I was very surprised at the lack of questions I was asked during the interviews and sessions overall. None of the women wanted to remain in contact after the research had ended. I felt disappointed that I had been unable to sustain rapport. The lack of time spent in the research field and voluntary nature of the groups themselves seriously impinged on

the amount of rapport I was allowed to forge. In addition, the very fact that the research was so closely associated with the criminal justice system and organisations that held negative connotations for some respondents, it was little wonder that any attempts to forge rapport were largely unsuccessful. Our 'subordinate structural position by virtue of our gender' (Finch 1984: 76) did not allow a shared identification to develop. My relationship with the women was short-lived. This transitory association was exploitative, but was essential to increase trust and disclosure. In spite of these difficulties, it would have been problematical for a male to conduct the same research or to elicit the same information, as many of the women stated that they 'hated men' (Field Diary 05.11.2008). In addition a man would not have been granted access to the Together Women centre.

3.8 Reflexivity

Power relationships

Despite sharing no obvious common characteristics, I looked for areas of personal overlap between respondents and myself where rapport could have emerged (Booth and Booth 1994). I intentionally dressed in a casual manner so as not to be too closely associated with authority or a university institution. I was constantly aware of potential unequal power dynamics throughout the research process. Indeed, as a researcher, I had the power to define the research situation, to steer the agenda along a certain course and to shape the production of the data. In reality, I had the power to make my own interpretation and version of the interviewee's story, which the women themselves might reject (Cant and Sharma 1988; Holland 2007). However my experience in the ethnographic field highlighted the fact that both respondents and interviewers may potentially exercise power (Cotterill 1992). During my interview with Kim, I felt powerless, threatened and quite intimidated as she asserted:

I feel in control, like I know that. Say like if I were going to fight with you, I know I'd grab you by the throat, and I'd hit you, and I know the next thing I'm going to do. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Oakley (1981) asserts that interviews are collaborative and interactional, with both interviewer and interviewee contributing to what is constructed and how the process unfolds. This study was very much dependent upon its respondents. The participants controlled the research operation, direction and content. My reliance on the respondents sometimes increased my apprehension and frustration (Cotterill 1992). The level of commitment and motivation of participants was rather low, most likely because some of the women were experiencing major upsetting events in their lives and others were involved in the criminal justice system. They were very busy women, especially during certain times of the year (for example school holidays); participants sometimes grappled with child care issues and illness. There were also frustrating occasions whereby interviewees, without explanation did not turn up to be interviewed.

On the other hand I found that key informants were a professional group capable of maintaining, and to some extent policing its own parameters. Key informants had more power and awareness of the interview process and its implications. For instance, one key informant requested that I turn off the recording device, so that scandalous stories and controversial viewpoints could be shared 'off the record'. These very frustrating occurrences made clear the negative implications of this long research relationship. I had gained the absolute trust of key informants, but faced a dilemma, should I place my research above the wishes of key informants? After considerable debate, I decided against including these confessions in my research. I cannot escape the fact that with such a close, lengthy research relationship with the centres, I experienced conflicts of interest throughout. In reality my dependence upon the centres meant that they had a considerable influence upon my research. I developed close, quite personal relationships with key informants, and as a result often found it difficult to pass judgement on the centres. In order to reduce bias and wanting to both please and criticise the centres, I opted to create two separate documents; one practitioner-centred document to be distributed to other domestic violence/perpetrator support agencies throughout the UK, and another more critical document, a PhD thesis for the purposes of academia (which will be accessible to S.T.O.P and Together Women).

Some of those studied were vulnerable, traumatised women; during interviews some respondents confided that they suffered from mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder,

depression and multiple personality disorder. In addition, a number of interviewees revealed that they had experienced severe mental and physical abuse. Most of the women I interviewed were struggling with problems relating to and deriving from poverty, lack of education, unemployment, housing difficulties, health problems, problems of parenting and difficulties within the family in general. Some of the women were co-operating with the social services whilst attending group sessions. A number of respondents claimed that they were seen by the social services as abusive or neglecting mothers; five women stated that they were afraid their children would be taken from them. For those women who had self-referred to S.T.O.P there was no screening to ensure that the women were well enough to participate, both in the group sessions and in the interviews. For some, these traumatic experiences and anxieties may have heightened their distress during the interview situation and group sessions. Trauma or learning difficulties may have cramped the women's ability to look back on their own past with reflexivity and clarity. Consequently, it was sometimes hard to establish the significance of past events in people's lives (Booth and Booth 1996). Often the women's persecutory feelings were simply too acute or persistent to be verbalised, acknowledged or contained. The women may have been affected by temporal distance from the event, and personal changes since then may have influenced their accounts. 'Individuals narratives about their troubles are works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit and the societies they live in' (Riessman 2003: 333). I often felt that it was difficult to inquire into aspects of respondents lives that were upsetting, especially as the women were often deeply anguished and distressed. When interviewing, I often skirted around certain sensitive issues. Like Sands and Krumer-Nevo (2006), I found that this avoidance was used as a defence, a fear reaction, and a means of preventing a clash over an issue that appeared to be delicate. In reality, 'this is understandable when the content is abhorrent or otherwise offensive, but this approach does not promote a deeper, more complex, expansive narrative' (Sands and Krumer-Nevo 2006: 965). In hindsight I feel that the experience was moving and highly uncomfortable at times (Hubbard *et al.* 2002); however the group interactions and reactions gave a fascinating and invaluable insight into the inner lives of violent women.

The interview as cathartic experience

For some respondents the research interview provided a welcomed outlet for suppressed emotion. Consistent with other research, despite the evident sadness experienced, participation was constructed as valuable and beneficial overall (Carter *et al.* 2008). The majority of women found the interviews to be helpful, supportive and an insightful experience (as with Campbell *et al.* 2010). The interview helped respondents view their own lives and violent experiences in new ways. For many, the experience of having someone listen with patience and real engagement as they talked openly and sometimes cried freely was very impactful (Campbell *et al.* 2010). Indeed, many of the women expressed that they had not previously had the opportunity to really think or talk about their use of violence:

But nobody has ever before asked me about when I was first violent. And it's weird, you made my mind go all over the place and start questioning, do you know what I mean? And I told my friend about it, I said to her I thought it was really good that you opened me like that, 'cos I've never, I don't really do it. (Bela, 26-35, S.T.O.P group attendee, no criminal record)

Many of the women maintained that taking part in the research enabled them to reflect upon their experiences and gain a better understanding of the role and impact of violence in their lives. I was certainly a legitimate beneficiary of the research, as many participants constructed their contribution as potentially helpful for me. Often the women accepted the cash incentive only when assured that it did not 'leave me out of pocket' (Field Diary 12.12.2008). However, I often felt constrained in my role as researcher and felt helpless when respondent's accounts were 'shrouded in emotionality' (Brannen 1988 cited in Hubbard *et al.* 2001: 125). Interviewees were often uneasy; and I had to instil confidence and composure (Booth and Booth 1994). Emotional labour was conducted during interview situations as I strove to oversee the respondent's emotions whilst also contending with my own emotional responses (Mann 2004). Faithful to 'feminist' discourse, I utilised emotion during personal reflections and diary entries to explain and give meaning to my interpretations and analysis. Indeed, 'not only can emotions affect the research process in terms of what is studied or not studied, by whom and in what way, but they may also influence researchers' interpretations and 'readings' of a situation' (Widdowfield 2000: 199). With such a sensitive topic, not only were emotions an inevitable and unavoidable part of the research process, but writing emotions into research accounts supplied a superior insight into the inner world of research participants (Mann 2004). Given their

potential impact upon the research process, it would seem that emotions were both a valid and an important issue for discussion.

The meaning and significance the women placed on events in their lives were always regarded with empathy and understanding. However, rapport was not a mutual process. I found it difficult to follow the 'feminist' imperative; I could not undertake a 'double move' by revealing myself in the process of studying the 'other' (Oakley 1981). I could not invest into the research relationship some of my identity, as I did not share the same experiences as participants. Dissecting sensitive issues and aspects of participant's lives about which they felt most vulnerable, while revealing little about myself, the women probably felt especially unnerved (Gadd 2004). While some participants were able to speak in a clear and articulate way and to express their ideas coherently, not all women had the ability to verbalise their experiences. I found that sometimes interviews were stilted and I received rather grudging replies; relaxed discussion of private material was not guaranteed. Beth presented herself as a woman who was not used to talking about herself. 'Her speech was very concrete and simple; she gave the impression that although she was willing to cooperate, she did not know how. The interview was very uncomfortable as points made were often underdeveloped' (Field Diary 09.01.2009). Most interviewees did not find it easy to logically develop a coherent, narrated life in which certain steps inevitably preceded others. The women come to the research as 'defended subjects'; participants depended upon this defensiveness for psychological protection during interviews (Gadd 2004).

3.9 Conclusion

Despite obtaining a partial understanding of interpersonal violence, close collaboration with West Yorkshire support services, purposive and snowball sampling allowed me to gain access to female perpetrators and key informants who would have otherwise remained out of reach. Throughout 'faking friendship' and the data collection experience, I found myself working with issues that were deeply personal and private. Some women's obvious upset during group sessions and interviews led me to question the moral and ethical basis of research that promotes such distressing revelations. Despite qualitatively capturing the attitudes and behaviours of women who are violent, I felt that their very personal disclosures were not a result of rapport or shared identification.

I have never endured domestic violence, rape, physical abuse or divorce. In spite of my gender, I could not identify or be identified by these women. In reality it was 'not possible to see or know from two quite different sites at once' (Cain 1986: 261 cited in Andrews 2002: 60). I imagine the women decided to reveal their inner thoughts as they felt that it was time to confront and voice suppressed traumatic memories. In reality, the opportunity to talk openly and informally to a 'friendly stranger' (Finch 1984) had a therapeutic effect for some respondents. I was amazed given the women's many problems that they were prepared to commit themselves and participate in a research study, which seemed to only offer a small cash incentive and sympathetic ear. For other interviewees the process generated conflict, denial and retreat. Indeed, 'the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater the danger' (Stacy 1988: 24). In spite of the difficulties of self-report and failed rapport, the women revealed private, intimate details that gave a first-rate insight into the nature of their use of violence. Although the details of women's experiences were unique, the themes that emerged helped to expose the ways in which female perpetrators understand their own use of violence. Regardless of their many disadvantages, the qualitative techniques employed were appropriate and provided the desired results. Despite gaining an insight into a partial 'truth', the anger management group observations, timelines and interviews (with both perpetrators and key informants) highly complemented and compensated each other

Chapter 4: Using violence: how and when is female violence manifested?

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, which explored important ethical issues and the methodology used in this study, this chapter examines the definitions and categorisations of aggressive acts employed by the participants of this research. Findings of this study demonstrate that women perpetrate a wide range of abusive behaviours towards both males and females. This chapter analyses the 'tricks' and tactics of violence employed by perpetrators, and the ways in which women self harm and are violent towards friends, family members, authority figures, acquaintances and strangers of both sexes. The influence and bearing the private and public spheres have on women's violent behaviours is also explored. Findings reveal that violence tends to be seen by respondents as acceptable, even celebrated in youth, but is often not condoned in older age when women are faced with the responsibilities of motherhood, and are expected to have 'calmed down'.

4.1 Definitions and categories of violence

Measuring the impact of violence is fraught with difficulties, not least because of definitional problems around what constitutes violence and how this might be quantified. Researching the ways in which women understand and use violence raises a number of issues due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, and gender of those taking part. The term violence can include an extensive array of experiences. The measures and indicators employed in social research fluctuate significantly as to the kind of experience deemed 'violent' (Mirrlees-Black 1999: 2). Inconsistent definitions used in research and policy (mainly with regard to inclusion or exclusion of sexual and psychological abuse), has resulted in the emergence of a vast range of qualitative and quantitative studies that concentrate mainly on physical violence (for further discussion see Chapter 2). In this study, the definition of violence was gauged by evaluating the various forms of aggression described by respondents. Seven categories of aggressive acts were scored. These were: verbal aggression; dominant behaviour; physical aggression; violent self-destructive behaviour; sexual assault; the destruction of objects or property; weapon use; and (see Fig. 1: Categories of aggressive acts p.43). Another category identified was unspecified

aggression: this classification was scored when information about the violent act was insufficient and/or unclear, for example, if women were said to 'fight', 'go off on one', 'carry on' or 'get into trouble'. However, it is important to note that some respondents were heavily influenced by the women's centres and criminal justice system. The ways in which violence was defined by these services were projected on to the anger management group members and possibly proved to shape their understandings (for discussion see Chapter 8).

Fig 1: Categories of aggressive acts

Verbal aggression	Defined by the use of words (for example threats and insults). This category was evaluated considering the following behaviours a) insulting, shouting and/or swearing b) saying something to upset and/or aggravate the opponent c) threats of physical aggression.
Dominant behaviour	Classified as a string of behaviours aimed at controlling the opponent's activities and decisions in the area of relations, family and emotional wellbeing.
Physical aggression	Identified as any kind of aggressive behaviour that include actions such as hitting, physically restraining, slapping, pushing/grabbing, trying to choke and/or beating.
Violent self-destructive behaviour	Filled with self-blame, guilt and self-hatred, violence is aimed inwards as a cycle of self-destructive behaviour is enacted. Alcohol/drug abuse, suicide attempts, promiscuity, self-harming and unhealthy diet (anorexia and over-eating) were documented amongst the participants of this study.

Sexual assault	Where respondents knowingly caused another person to engage in unwanted sexual acts.
Destruction of objects or property	Common amongst the participants of this study, the women would damage their own or their opponents belongings, objects and/or property. One respondent would steal property in order to express her anger.
Weapon use	Characterised as any kind of aggressive behaviour that include actions such as throwing an object and using a weapon. The definition of a weapon varies across legal systems, but an adequate description would be 'a tool that is designed or adapted to cause physical harm' (Brennan <i>et al.</i> 2009: 216).

4.2 The women's employment of violent tactics and 'tricks'

This research focused more on obvious forms of aggression. Respondents generally discussed their use of physical acts of violence, such as hitting, kicking or punching. It may be that this focus on physical violence worked to mask other forms of aggression, in particular, women's use of verbal abuse, which is often intended and/or experienced as potentially more hurtful and damaging (Batchelor *et al.* 2001). Some respondents discussed using verbal aggression, threats and intimidating behaviour. As Anne explains:

...I was getting so angry, smashing doors in my house, I was shouting at my daughter constantly. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

As respondents narratives were not supported or corroborated, there was no way of gauging the extent of damage caused by these behaviours. Interestingly, one group session attendee stated that shouting swear words was an accepted and valued outlet for

aggression. It was used by this group participant to help prevent anger from escalating 'out of control', and was experienced as an enjoyable regulatory method. Indeed, this group member maintained the 'dirtier the word, the better I feel' (Field Diary 22.10.2008). Research on gender differences in aggression typically reveal that females may exhibit less physical aggression than males, and rely on less noticeable tactics when aggressing (Felson and Cares 2005). However, some interviewees described how verbal threats would quickly escalate into action. For example, Eve states:

[My partner at the time] had his dad's ashes on like this bookcase, and I said [to him] 'if you don't shut up I'm gonna pour those ashes over your head' (small laugh) so I picked the green urn thing up, opened the top and just got handfuls of his dad's ashes and threw them in his face. He shut up then. He liked to like push me to the limit [with his incessant talking], but I always told him, like I'd say 'if you don't shut up, I'm warning you, I'm gonna knock your *fucking* head off'. But he knew I'd follow it through, it wasn't like I was making *idle* threats. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

Choosing to throw the ashes rather than the urn itself, it would seem that it was Eve's intention to shock her partner into silence; to inflict mental cruelty rather than physical harm. The fact that 'handfuls' of ashes were thrown suggests that her taunting, goading behaviour may have been intentional and calculated. The derisive tone of voice used and small laugh given imply that Eve found her behaviour amusing. Amongst the respondents of this study, 'proper fights' were often perceived to be those which seemingly had high risk consequences for both parties; where there was definite intention to do harm, where weapons were often used:

...But this was like a proper fight like, she hit me with a bottle on the side of my head and er I didn't really know what was going on, I was *so* confused. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

'Proper fights' are sometimes seen as being different from stereotypically female forms of aggression, for instance 'scratching', 'hair pulling' and 'talking behind backs'. Some respondents were very keen to disassociate themselves from indirect, underhand 'girly' styles of fighting:

You know I'm not one of them girls that will pull hair and this and that, I'd grab your throat and hit you in your face. I never, the only thing is, that I don't talk about people behind their backs. I'm not scared of anyone, if I've got anything to

say I'll say it to their face. And like when people try and get me to talk about other people I *won't* talk about someone behind their back. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Kim distinguishes herself as distinct from other girls. It seems that she prides herself in taking more direct forms of action; of being frank and fearless in the face of her adversaries. Kim gives the message that she is a person who means business; her tactics of violence are aimed to intimidate and defeat those who stand in her way. This finding is at odds with the suggestion that female aggression is often expressed in 'displaced, attenuated or disguised forms' (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974: 234) due to its gender-inappropriateness. Often respondents committed acts of violence that are typically associated with, and very similar to men's violence (see Canaan 1996; Braithwaite 1989). Interviewees often described utilising violent tactics such as 'rugby tackling', 'head-butting' and 'punching' to overcome their adversaries. Indeed, it appears that violence is not exclusively the reserve of men, the participants of this study conducted serious physical, psychological and in one case even sexual violence. As Jane explained:

I knew that if I got [my husband] to sit on this dildo on top, and pull him down then that would hurt him. And I just, I took [my husband's] role. I were like that 'oh yeah, come on this is great!' I think that was absolutely hilarious, I can't say whether that was right or wrong but (pause) he took himself to the toilets limping away and all the rest of it (Jane mimics her husband limping). And after five minutes, now I know he didn't want to do it anymore, but I just laid on the bed in the same position where I were, he comes into the room 'oh, oh, oh!'. He's never bothered about me saying that it hurt, and it were uncomfortable and all the rest of it, if it were him that wanted to do it to me then that seemed fine. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

Given that the issue of female perpetrated sexual abuse has until very recently been overlooked and considered a non-existent phenomenon (see Hillan 1995), the prevalence of sexual violence in this study is highly unexpected and quite remarkable. Clearly Jane takes great pleasure in sexually dominating her husband and uses this opportunity to wreak her revenge. She takes her husband's role, taunting and mocking him when he is vulnerable and in pain. Jane uses humour when re-counting the role-reversal: her tone of voice was animated and excited during the interview. Evidently, she felt her behaviour was justified and well deserved. It is interesting to note that Jane's husband had spent many years in the army. It is possible that Jane found great satisfaction in emasculating and

controlling this army man, who for many years had held a position of power and authority, both in the public and private sphere. Consistent with Burbank (1987) this study found that some women employ aggression as a means of coercion or domination:

Sarah: Who's got the power in the relationship?

Sue: Me

Sarah: In which way?

Sue: Erm, basically (pause) like I can do what I want. I don't have to answer for anything, like if I want to go out and spend whatever money we have and stuff like that, there'll be nothing said about it. Whereas if it were him doing it, I'd be totally different, not necessarily get violent, but I'd be annoyed or whatever. He don't go out with his friends cos he's scared of what I'll say, which is why he doesn't do it. Right now he's stopped drinking now because I have, and he had no reason to stop, he enjoyed it, he never got violent, never got angry. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Sue's narrative seems to mirror Johnson's (1995; 2000) *intimate terrorism* category of violence (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). *Intimate terrorism* it is claimed is perpetrated almost exclusively by men, and is a result of 'patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their women'. It is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation and other control tactics' (Johnson 1995: 284). Sue's account seems to contradict arguments made by Swan and Snow (2002) that culturally dictated norms greatly limit women's ability to maintain absolute control over a male partner. However, to truly determine whether the female perpetrators in this study were *intimate terrorists*, respondents narratives would need to be corroborated by assessing the partner's level of fear, the extent to which he feels controlled by her and his sense of disempowerment and helplessness. In reality, the findings of this study are not consistent with Burbank's (1987) survey of adult female aggression, which demonstrates that in most cases women largely appear to inflict relatively minor physical injury on their victims.

Weapon use

Some respondents carried and used weapons on both male and female opponents. Weapons were utilised by the women to cause and to deter harm. In line with other research (Smith and Uchida 1988) participants were motivated to carry weapons by the need for self-defence and survival:

Sarah: Why did you carry a knife?

Jess: Pure safety reasons. I've been in fights and people have pulled knives on me and I didn't have a knife. Not, just flesh wounds, not like proper sort of stabs. But it was kind of like a safety thing, but it was also like I felt that I had to. I was so young and the people I was mixing with were a lot, lot older. I was in this gangster world I suppose. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For Jess, who felt vulnerable and did not have the confidence or physical ability to safeguard herself from her adversaries, carrying and/or using a weapon was seen as a must. Here, carrying a knife was justified by Jess as a rational decision; a necessity when the odds were stacked against her. Increased fear of personal harm enhanced the need for self-protection. Indeed, as with other studies (Williams *et al.* 2002), findings suggest that a strong predictor for weapon carrying was the perception that others were carrying weapons. A number of respondents felt that weapon carrying and weapon use reinforced a violent reputation. Indeed 'the display of a weapon during an altercation creates a definite power shift towards the carrier' (Brennan and Moore 2009: 219). Warr and Stafford (1983) maintain that previous victimisation suggests a heightened fear of crime, and consequently an increased proclivity for weapon carrying. This certainly was the case for Afia, who saw carrying weapons as a 'normal' activity:

Sarah: What do you carry?

Afia: Knives, anything, pepper sprays, snooker balls in socks, you name it, Stanley Knives, anything. And I'd have like three or four weapons in my bag.

Sarah: To make you feel protected?

Afia: Yeah when I got it, yeah cos if anyone bad comes up to me and he wants to do whatever, or threaten me or whatever, I'll get it out. And I've got this thing about *main veins*, if I'm gonna do it then I'll get you. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

It is interesting that Afia perceives any 'bad' rivals to be male. During the interview she made a point of stressing her hatred of men, mainly as a result of experiencing severe

sexual and physical violence throughout her lifetime. This respondent talks of calculatingly targeting ‘main veins’ and it is clearly her intention to seriously harm or even kill potential opponents. Like Afia, many respondents employed premeditated weapon use, where objects designed or adapted to cause harm were brought to the scene of the incident by the perpetrator (Brennan and Moore 2009). For instance, Kim describes the ‘tricks’ used to fight her adversaries:

My trick used to be I’d put a lighter in my hand there (between her fingers) because then, your knuckles don’t give, you know when you fight, and it makes *your* punch harder. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Kim’s distinct tactic was employed to deceive and defeat both male and female rivals in a rational and calculated way. When ‘going out’ Kim explained how she felt ‘on guard’ and used certain safety measures to limit the damage of being targeted by others. For instance, Kim avoided wearing ‘baggy clothing’, ‘earrings’ and ‘bracelets’ and would ensure that her hair was ‘tied up’ as ‘girls will grab your hair and rip your hair out’. While some respondents purposely visited spaces to ‘do battle’ and perpetrated acts of violence that were deliberate and often pre-planned, a number of interviewees utilised weapons in a spontaneous way, making use of tools and objects that were found at the scene of the incident. Kitchen knives, table lamps, screwdrivers, yucca plants, planks of wood and cups were used by some respondents as weapons. Eve explains how she would use any objects which came to hand:

Oh I’d punch [my partner at the time], kick him (pause) hit him over the head with a chair, *anything* (pause) anything that were in my reach. I’ve hit him with telephones, kicked him off his arse. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

4.3 Violence towards men

In a cross-cultural survey of female aggression, Burbank (1987) found that women were by far the most common targets of female aggression. This is of course a mirror image of the finding that men are most often the targets of male aggression (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974; Walker *et al.* 2009). However, research suggests that when targets are male, female aggression consists of threatening behaviour, nonverbal insults and the non-performance of duties or expected behaviours (Burbank 1994). However this was not the case for this sample of female perpetrators:

...with my *ex* yeah, there was no holding back sometimes, I would try with all my might to try and hurt him as much as I could. (Jude, 26-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Women would often act without restraint, and it was the definite intention of some respondents to cause as much damage as possible to male adversaries. A number of participants took great pride in their physical strength, two interviewees explained how 'working out' and keeping fit afforded power and self-respect. As Zoe boasts:

I've got a lot of body strength even though I'm quite small. I can take down a fully grown man quite easily, erm, but I mean I used to play rugby, I used to play hockey, I used to play American football. I was never like (pause) soft, I was never (pause) I was always quite tough. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

It is interesting that Zoe achieves a 'hard' self image through participating in traditionally masculine, physically demanding sports such as rugby (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). In spite of her small stature, Zoe derives pleasure and confidence in knowing that she could confidently 'take down a fully grown man'. However, not all respondents shared the same self-assurance in their physical abilities. A number of women certainly believed that male opponents were bigger, stronger and more capable of aggressive retaliation than they were:

And, I did run up after [my husband], and, I guess I ran after him to hit him. Erm, he threw me on bedroom floor, he had his knee across my throat. He's in army, he's trained in arm to arm combat, he knew what he was doing. He *knew* that I couldn't breathe. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

Women often identified themselves as being the victim of male violence (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). A number of respondents felt that their use of aggression paled in comparison to the violence perpetrated by men:

[My partner] would push me to my limits, and, and, whether it was (pause) yeah I would lash out at him, but it was to get him to shut up 'cos he wouldn't leave my head alone, and he really wouldn't. And I'd lash out at him, and I'm sure that's where he wanted me to go, cos if I'd hit him first, it would give him an excuse to give me a good pasting. (Hannah, 46-55, S.T.O.P victim support group attendee, no criminal record)

Hannah's experiences seem to be consistent with research that demonstrates that men generally do not perceive women as intimidating or frightening (Jacobson *et al.* 1994). Hannah describes her partner as dominant, controlling, violent and cruel; she portrays herself as a 'victim'. She may be what Johnson (2000) labelled *violent resisters*, that is, women who fight physically against a partner who attempts to coercively control them.

In line with the literature, it is notable that respondents used weapons in a greater proportion of their attacks on men than they did in attacks on other women. This could be due to the fact that younger men are typically physically stronger than women. Often, greater reactivity on the part of male targets provoked the use of weapons and/or objects by respondents. When executed successfully, indirect strategies proved to be highly effective and were often more appealing than directing physical violence towards male targets. Bjorkqvist (1994) argues that although males and females experience hostile feelings to the same degree, their differences in physical strength lead women to use methods other than physical aggression to attain their desired goals. When witnessing a fight, Kim decided to intervene, and used objects to reinforce her own physical strength and tip the balance in her favour:

I mean, all my lad friends had been fighting with lads, and I had a pair of heels on, and one of my friends was on the floor getting hit hard, so I took one of my heels off and went legging it down and just wacked it around this guys head, knowing that my fist won't do the job, I'll go for the next thing, like my handbag or whatever I've got. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For Kim, using objects and/or weapons against male adversaries was obviously acceptable and within 'the rules' of fighting (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). It is possible that Kim's intention was not only to defend and support her friend, but to demonstrate that her fighting abilities were equal, if not better than that of 'the lads'. Arguably her aim was to earn respect and gain equality. This story reveals that Kim is driven and resourceful as she employs whatever objects come to hand. It is interesting that the objects often used were 'heels' and 'handbags'; in this way Kim works to affirm her femininity despite her use of brutal violence. Like Kim, some respondents would assess and weigh up the situation first before using violence. Women would sometimes employ violence 'because they could'; when they were sure that their opponent would not retaliate. For example, Jess asserted:

...there was the odd occasion where [my current partner], we'd argued and he'd pushed me, erm, and I hit him back after that, actually hit him because I *could*, because I knew that he wouldn't *ever* lay into me, ever. Like with [my ex partner] he fractured my knee, my ankle, erm, all sorts of things, I couldn't fight back with him. But with [my current partner] I could, so sometimes if he just pushed me I would hit him because I could, not because I wanted to really, it was just because I could and it was nice to have the feeling of being able to do that after being in such an abusive relationship. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Having been subjected to severe physical abuse from a previous partner, perpetrating violence may have allowed Jess to expel the hurt and anger which had built up during her previous victimisation. She experienced a sense of liberation in being able to employ violence, without danger, in her current relationship. Bjorkqvist (1994) argues that individuals implement violent strategies that maximise the intended results while minimising personal risk. The *effect-danger* ratio is a subjective interpretation that considers the likely consequences of an aggressive act (Bjorkqvist 1994). Often, indirect, oblique tactics were utilised by respondents to harm men; physical violence was not always used. In order to get vengeance, Kim knew that she could not physically 'beat' her ex-boyfriend, so instead opted to vent her anger and 'get him back' in a way that would ensure her immediate safety, and provide a sense of satisfaction:

...like my ex-boyfriend, we'd been together for nearly, going on two years, and I found out that he was cheating on me. And he used to *absolutely* love his car, so I got a sledge hammer and I *smashed* it to smithereens out of it, I smashed every window, I hit the bonnet, got on top of it and hit the roof, I let all the tires down, I mashed it up. And that made me feel content knowing, cos he'd hurt me, I'd got him back. You know, I got him, cos obviously he were a big guy, I couldn't beat him. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Many of the women interviewed described damaging either their own or someone else's property during fits of rage. It was common for respondents to confess to 'putting hands through windows', 'smashing phones', 'smashing up houses' and 'breaking down doors'. These violent methods served to successfully express the women's anger. However, property damage was at times accidental and unintentional, and respondents would feel guilt, regret and frustration at having caused excessive, gratuitous destruction. Emma describes the negative consequences of property damage:

You know there's been times like, I've had arguments and I've hit things, like off the sides, and they've broke. And they've been things that mean a lot to me, and then when I calm down and I sit in the big mess, and I think 'god, why have I done all this?'. You know like when I trash my bedroom, I sit there surrounded by *broken* things, and I think 'well I liked that' and then it's me that's got to tidy the mess up, nobody else is going to do it. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

4.4 Violence towards friends and family

There were some categories of people with whom women rarely fought. A number of respondents refused to direct injurious, detrimental aggression against friends and family members, as the quotes below demonstrate:

...with my mum I was always very aware when I was being violent towards her that it was my mum, and I didn't really want to hurt her. So it's almost like I wanted to let her know how angry I was but without doing her a lot of damage, like I would push her, or if I hit her, or like (pause) I don't really remember ever laying into my mum, it was more like shoves. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

I was quite violent towards my sisters but I was never (pause) I'd never let myself *get* really bad with my sisters, they would fight with me but they would fight like girls fight, pulling hair, scratching me. And I thought 'if I *really* let go, I'd fucking batter you' but I wouldn't do that to my sisters. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Both respondents 'hold back' by regulating and curtailing their use of violence towards female family members. Jude conveys her anger through physical displays of aggression; however it is made clear that it is not her intention to cause serious injury, despite her capacity to do so. 'Pushes' and 'shoves' were deemed 'acceptable' violence, and used as a means of communicating powerful emotions. The negative associations with the term 'violence' may have precluded participants from retelling certain experiences. In line with other studies (Burman 2004), certain violence, for instance between siblings and family members was seen as 'normal' and 'within the rules':

The violence with my brother, but I never really saw that as me being violent, it were me and my brother being made to fight. It were normal, it were just like that all the time. It's not a big, it's not a thing. It were a normal life thing, it's not

something that stands out, proper violence. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Friends and family were often revered. For a number of interviewees, friends replaced family and provided much needed care, support and security. For those with failed support systems, friends were relied upon for protection in a 'gangster world':

Because I used to hang around with a lot of black guys and because I was so young, they were in their thirties and they used to, mother me is the wrong word, but they used to really look after me, really watch out for me. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

However, not all interviewees experienced such support and care. Despite sharing a sense of closeness and comradeship with her friends, Kim could not lay her trust in them and was constantly aware that they might one day betray her:

And this sounds awful but I know a lot of my friends think that I think the world of them, but to be honest they're just acquaintances to me, cos I *know* they'll do me wrong one day. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Possibly Kim feels that the appearance of genuine friendship is more valuable than the friendship itself. Being a gang member, the temporary sense of security and power Kim receives from her 'friends' is all-important (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). Clearly this pretence of friendship and appeasement of fellow gang members is essential, despite Kim's absolute conviction that they will 'one day' exhibit disloyalty. While some interviewees strongly disapproved of aggression towards friends and family members, others stated that they often 'hurt the ones they love' (Field Diary 04.02.2009). One respondent in particular directed unrestrained violence towards her parents:

I've been arrested loads of times from my mum's house you know, if I've smashed the house up or just being goby or she just wanted me out of the house. When I've hit her or bust her nose she's phoned the police on me. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

Emma was reluctant to discuss her reasons for focusing her aggression on these blood relations, stating instead that 'the beer' had strongly influenced and controlled her behaviour.

4.5 Opposing authority

Many participants were negatively disposed towards the police and other figures in the criminal justice system; they had no respect for those in authority and despised the judgement of others and being 'told what to do'. A number of respondents had displayed hostility and/or perpetrated violence towards a range of authority figures, for instance police, social services, mental health workers and teachers. For example, Afia stated:

And then when the police came, I assaulted the copper, [they] sprayed me up with CS gas to calm me down, it didn't calm me. I went crazy, they used three or four bottles on me, I was still going crazy. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

In line with the notion that some respondents enjoyed violence and endeavoured to create a 'hard' image (see Chapter 7 for further discussion), it appears that Afia took pleasure in the fact that she was seemingly unstoppable, despite police intervention and CS gas. Afia takes great pride in describing how her violent behaviour could not be quelled.

A number of respondents believed that they had been treated particularly unfairly by the police and social services, and held negative attitudes towards these organisations. This is consistent with research findings that document high levels of dissatisfaction with police among residents of poor neighbourhoods (Huang and Vaughan 1996). Furthermore, recent controversy over so called 'Stop Snitching' campaigns in the US has focused attention on youthful opposition to, and dissatisfaction with law enforcement (Huang and Vaughan 1996). Some of this coverage has fuelled the popular contention that a lawless youth subculture exists 'that eschews the assistance of formal social control in constraining crime' (Carr *et al.* 2007: 446). Kim's insistence on taking the law in her own hands appears to confirm this belief:

...like if [my friends are] fighting, you know and someone's getting the better of them, I can't *stand by* and like ring the police and let the police come and sort it. I can't, it's impossible for me.

Sarah: Why?

Kim: Cos I know they're going to take ages, and in that time anything can happen. Like one of my friends got stabbed about three weeks ago, and I wish I were there. *No one* looked out for her, she got beaten by fifteen girls. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Evidently Kim does not place her faith in the ability of the police to take action. In her eyes they are ineffective and incompetent. In accordance with Carr *et al.* (2007), the findings of this study suggest that although some respondents had negative encounters with the police, criminal justice system and/or other figures of authority, they were often forced to rely upon and work with these powerful organisations in order to fulfil their aspirations and ‘sort out’ their lives (for further discussion see Chapter 8). As Helen states:

I thought, it’s time, keep my nose clean, show Social Services and that that I can do it. And then I started seeing my daughter, supervised and then unsupervised, and now I see her every fortnight, well it’s practically every week I see her. (Helen, 36-45, Together Women client, criminal record)

4.6 Violence in private and public spaces

While nine interviewees had been violent towards strangers, other respondents were eager to dissociate themselves from individuals who ‘look for fights’ with people unknown to them:

I’ve never been one for going out and having fights, things like that. I’m not a violent person in terms of going out and having a fight in a nightclub, or like, I don’t enjoy violence on that level. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

[It’s] really strange how, if I was drunk and in town, if anybody said anything wrong to me I would *walk away*, I wouldn’t pursue it, I’d just walk away. But if my mum, my dad or [my partner] said anything to me when I were drunk, I’d lash out. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

These narratives seem to tie in with research that demonstrates that individuals self-present in a much more self-promoting manner with strangers and in a more modest manner with friends and acquaintances (Tice *et al.* 1995; Winstok 2006). On the other hand some participants would have no qualms in displaying violence publically:

Erm, I poured a pint over [my partner’s] head in the pub, when he were talking, talking, talking (makes a hand gesture to mimic a mouth talking). I gave him a punch once outside the theatre, cos he was talking. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

Other participants would be filled with embarrassment and shame if their use of physical violence was witnessed by others:

...I were absolutely mortifyingly astounded by the fact that some very nice, very middle aged neighbours were just walking down the street and saw me do that. And in a way that's even *worse* as well, because they didn't see what [my husband had] done to me *before*, and they're seeing me doing this and I just sort of, it really shocked me. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

For Jane her humiliation was intensified by the fact that the middle aged bystanders were perceived to be 'respectable' and 'nice'. She feels that being witnessed threatening her husband with a screwdriver attracted the unfair negative judgement and scorn of others, particularly as she perceived herself to be a 'victim'. Her feelings were possibly made worse by the fact that the witnesses were neighbours; they lived in the same area and would possibly have to encounter each other in the future. It is interesting that participants were often not as concerned regarding the reactions of others when non-physical forms of aggression were employed in public. It could be that verbal and/or indirect violence is more hidden, less shocking and possibly seen as more 'gender-appropriate' when compared to overt physical violence.

4.7 Age and stage

The vast majority of respondents described first using violence at a young age. Turning to the timeline (see Chapter 5 for further discussion), a number of interviewees stated that they had been a bully in school, and had a 'troublemaker' identity attached to them from a young age. As Imogen explains:

And if you were naughty [in school] you had to sit in the hall in a hoop, and I were always in that hoop. Cos my mum used to be a dinner lady at the same school, and she used to say 'what's she done now?'. I used to have these [school] reports which said 'she's headstrong, will do what she wants to do, regardless of the consequences'. (Imogen, 36-45, group attendee, criminal record)

Jude described 'fights' at school as 'normal kid's things'. They were understood as insignificant occurrences, which paled in comparison to later life events. Violence at school was also typically seen as a form of amusement and entertainment where hordes of

children would gather excitedly to witness skirmishes (see Chapter 7 for further discussion on violence as a form of entertainment). Many interviewees explained that the use of violence at a young age had many positive outcomes. Being able to beat older, seemingly tougher opponents was a source of great pride and satisfaction for some respondents. As Kim described:

Right at sixteen I were in the pub and I had a tenner in my hand and I were stood at the bar like that [demonstrates how she was holding the note in her outstretched hand], and this woman, she must have been twenty five, twenty six, tried to take my tenner. And I said to her 'come outside' and I just started fighting with her, and I beat her. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For Kim, this confrontation was seen as a 'contest of honour' in which she was able to maintain 'face'; where her social status and reputation for violence was secured amongst her peers. For other respondents, violence perpetrated during childhood was described as severe and of high consequence. As Jo states:

...that's all I know is that I used to hit people a lot at school and I used to smash my room up a lot. And then in high school I used to do it but I'd get into trouble all the time for it, so that's when I started (pause), one time they tried suspending me for something that I never did and that's when I started turning it in on myself [self-harm]. (Jo, 18-25, Together Women client, criminal record)

Jo describes her school life as being relatively unsettled. She had been suspended from a number of schools for being violent and had eventually attended a 'special school'. Preferring to internalise her anger and avoid harming those around her, Jo had self-harmed for a number of years. It has been found that levels of delinquency in adolescence were a significant predictor of adult involvement in relationship violence (Giordano *et al.* 1999). Criminologists tend to agree that 'once a pattern of antisocial behaviour is established, there is some likelihood that an individual will continue in a nonconforming direction' (Giordano *et al.* 1999: 20). However, it has been argued that increased emotional self-regulation relates positively to age, where 'individuals have better control over mechanisms for inhibiting impulsive behaviour associated with direct aggression' (Walker and Richardson 1998: 293). The findings of this study correspond with this line of reasoning. For instance, Anne describes how she is a changed woman after attending S.T.O.P group sessions, and states how her life has transformed:

...I don't go out as much, if I go out I'll have a glass of wine and I'll go out for dinner instead of partying, well it's too much money for me now anyway. But I just, I'm growing up, I'm twenty seven now, I'm not that kid anymore. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

For a number of respondents, overt violent behaviour was related with young age, immaturity and irresponsibility:

Yeah [my mum] was quite [violent] (pause) and I didn't think much of it when I was younger, but *now* I think she was actually thirty odd at the time. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

...because we're all growing up now, we don't want to be going, causing fights, fighting over silly little things. You know, cos my hands are disgusting, got teeth, nail marks [on my arms], *absolutely* sick. You know, I'm not *proud* of the things I've done. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Undoubtedly, 'growing up' was associated with having a family, drinking less and behaving 'sensibly', perhaps even setting an example to others, particularly their own children. For some respondents violence was seen as outside the confines of parenthood; they sought to be 'good mothers' and to conform to gendered stereotypes.

4.8 Conclusion

In line with other research (see Burbank 1987) respondents displayed a range of aggressive behaviours. When angered, the women destroyed property and started fist fights. Participants also insulted, ridiculed, and/or quarrelled with other people. In physical attacks, women bit, scratched, head-butted, threw objects and wielded weapons. They used pepper sprays, Stanley Knives, screwdrivers, high heeled shoes and knives. This chapter has highlighted women's agency and the 'tricks' and various tactics of violence employed by perpetrators. When interviewing participants, it became very clear that some women enjoyed and took pleasure in controlling and dominating both their male and female opponents. This stands in direct contrast to other research, which illustrates that 'women's violence needs to be examined within the context of male violence and abuse' (Swan and Snow 2006: 286).

Chapter 5: Explanations of female violence

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter which examined the ways in which female aggression is manifested and the tactics of violence employed by perpetrators, this chapter explores the rationale and motivations behind women's use of violence. For many respondents, violence was seen as a 'normal' way of life. A number of interviewees worked towards achieving or preserving a violent reputation; fighting was often condoned, celebrated and used as a survival strategy in order to protect themselves and others in a 'criminal underworld'. Some respondents had experienced a history of abuse from family members and/or intimate partners. Consequently, aggression was sometimes perceived as a 'learned' reaction and/or employed in mutually violent relationships. This chapter considers the ways in which alcohol and drug use fuels women's use of violence, how aggression is at times attributed to a build up of emotions and 'out of control' behaviour. On the other hand, some respondents described using violence in a rational and calculated way. The addictive qualities of aggression were discussed and violence at times provided a sense of release, enjoyment and a form of entertainment for others.

5.1 Violence as 'normality'

Many respondents had witnessed violence when growing up, from both mother and father. Their families, friends and neighbours used violence, and violence for them was a 'normal' way of life. Sue described aggression as 'running in the blood', as she explained how her grandfather was a 'top street fighter', renowned for his vicious behaviour:

[My granddad] used to always fight in, there used to be a flea market where bus station is now, there used to be a flea market there. And they all, at the end of the day on a Saturday they all used to fight there for the money for their beer on Saturday night. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Sue's grandfather was celebrated and well respected for his physical skill by those in his local community. The regular fights at the flea market provided a means of making money and was a source of great entertainment. Sue reports that her grandfather's reputation served to trumpet the family name, as the family became well-known in the local area for

using violence. A large number of participants came from families with a violent tradition. Some interviewees described how the merits of violence had been taught and passed on from generation to generation:

It's hard you know, cos I'm from an Irish background I've got the Irish temperament you know. If there was trouble or whatever, my mother used to learn us that we had to fight, and if you didn't fight, you'd get beaten up at home. It would be one or the other. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

From a young age, Afia was coerced by her mother to use violence in order to manage 'trouble'. Coming from an 'Irish background' and possessing the stereotypically quick-tempered temperament, it was expected that Afia use violence. Often 'standing up for yourself' by using physical violence was condoned, socially accepted and even congratulated by peers and family members. This was especially the case when Zoe felt that she was being bullied at school:

[My friends] were surprised that I stood up to [the bullies] as well, but they were glad that I did. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

The use of violence and intimidation were sometimes seen as acceptable ways of dealing with confrontation. Using aggression to 'fight your corner' and trounce bullies was often seen as 'within the rules' of violence (see Chapter 7 for further details). Many respondents explained how violence was often seen as a 'norm', where it was habitually used to quell arguments and help solve any difficulties. For one interviewee in particular, it was only when she had committed a very grave act of physical violence that she realised the seriousness of her behaviour:

Sarah: Why did you see yourself as a violent woman?

Sue: Cos I were always out of control, cos I'd been violent before, most of my arrests have been for violence. Er (pause) but it were just the shock of you know, actually cutting somebody's throat made me realise that I were out of control. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Although associating being arrested with 'out of control' behaviour, Sue describes being apprehended as a regular, relatively insignificant occurrence. However 'cutting somebody's throat' was seen as a step too far; it highlighted Sue's capacity to seriously

injure or even murder her opponents, and served to 'shock' her into taking action to alter her behaviour.

A number of respondents discussed situations where the threat of violence was ever present, for instance in the domestic sphere, night clubs and in certain post code areas. Afia explains how experiencing threatening behaviour and perpetrating violence had become a way of life:

...don't come to my house and intimidate *me*, cos I'm a *woman*, cos straight away I'm on it, cos that's been my life, you know what I mean? I'm not scared. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

Echoing Artz's study (1999) into girl's violence, some interviewees talked of constantly being 'on guard' and ready for a fight. However, this was not the case for all women. A small number of respondents described a 'happy childhood' and family life, where violence had no role to play:

No my mum's always taught me, you know, at school, if somebody's hit me, to go and tell the teachers. My mum has never had a fight in her *life*, she's not violent. And I mean my dad's not even violent either. He's quite a calm man, and that's why I don't understand where I've got it from. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For some women, life presented two options: experience victimisation or perpetrate violence. The following quotation is an indictment of how violence and abuse became a part of everyday life for Jo:

My mum's always brought me up not to let anybody bully me, do you know, which is right really. If I had kids then I'd bring them up to be the same, not to be fighting all the time but not to let anyone bully them, cos you're gonna get bullied for the rest of your life more or less if you let people do that, do you know? (Jo, 18-25, Together Women client, criminal record)

Not all respondents came from a working class background. Two interviewees were keen to emphasise that they had been reared in a 'respectable', middle-class environment, far removed from the unstable, violent lifestyles they were later to lead:

My mum and dad lived in a really nice part of Sheffield. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

...my mum's a very intelligent person. She's kept a really *good* job, always kept us in a really nice middle-class area, [a] really nice house. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For these women, 'respectability' was associated with intelligence, being a 'good mother', living in a 'nice' area and retaining a 'really good job'. Clearly, these very conventional aspirations were highly regarded by both respondents. Paradoxically, in conjunction with these desires, some women also hankered after the very different status and respect that a violent identity affords in a 'criminal underworld'. Many interviewees emphasised the importance of being heard and of receiving respect:

Give me respect and I'll give it to you back. Knock on my door with an attitude, come at me like a big man and I will batter you like a big man. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

As already mentioned in Chapter 5, some women were not afraid to 'hold back' when their opponents were male. Using weapons, objects and/or their own physical strength, a number of respondents felt confident that they could defeat male adversaries.

5.2 Violent reputations

Status was all important, and for some women this was achieved through acquiring a 'hard reputation'. For a number of respondents, a reputation helped to ensure that they would no longer be 'walked all over', seen as 'soft' or as a 'doormat'. Jess describes an incident where she was 'manhandled' by a bouncer and thrown out of a club:

It was just being manhandled by a man. And I used to think, you just think I'm some stupid little girl, a sixteen or seventeen year old *girl*. It's just get off me, I could get you fucking killed tomorrow. I've got, you know, I had such connections [to people with guns], it was a 'you don't know who I am' sort of thing. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Having 'connections' to dangerous, powerful people provided Jess with a sense of heightened importance. Jess hides behind this association as she attempts to distance herself from being a defenceless, vulnerable, 'stupid little girl'. Indeed, 'notoriety has its attractions and being feared offers a sense of security' (Artz 1999: 192). For some women, experiencing humiliation, feeling threatened and/or undermined often triggered angry feelings and a need to retaliate. Sally reveals:

Er (pause), the reason why I was violent at school was because I kept on being picked on. And er, getting called names, getting abuse, them sort of things, and because of things that were happening at home, because of me getting abused at home and that lot, my way of dealing with it was just by lashing out at people, fighting people. I thought well, that's happening at home, I'm getting picked on, bullied, and at end of the day, I can't have

people thinking they can push me about and that lot. (Sally, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Many respondents described feeling powerless on a number of occasions in their lives, and were determined never to be victims again. Similar to Caldwell *et al.* (2009), findings of this study suggest that violence was sometimes used as a 'tough guise' which may have been a response to high levels of victimisation. For the women interviewed, the use of violence reinforced their capacity 'to affect positive outcomes and serve as a tool for survival and resistance' (Jack 1999: 29). Respondents obtained a sense of pride, control, power and security from their use of aggression:

Yeah I did feel in control. I was this sixteen year old girl fighting women in their early twenties, mid twenties erm, it were really quite rough and I was like a sixteen year old girl, seventeen. And they were bleeding on the floor and I were stood there, and like 'I'm fucking sixteen, I've got the self control to fight back'. I felt (pause) I felt quite powerful because I got quite a reputation as someone kind of not to mess with. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Interviewees adopted a 'hard' persona in their everyday lives as a strategy to protect them from further harm. Moreover, some of these women lived in neighbourhoods where violence was commonplace. Appearing 'tough' may have been a way of coping with and fitting into a 'disruptive lifestyle':

I was (pause) well, before I were taking drugs, so the area that I was living in there was drugs around and that. There were drugs like, I was still involved, and it were like a disruptive lifestyle and that, I needed to get away from that area. (Sally, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

A number of respondents also described the negative consequences of having a violent reputation. Being 'known' for violent, non-conformist behaviour sometimes worked to ostracise individuals. As Jess highlights:

Erm, there was one guy, he was sort of quite rebellious in school and he called me a druggie, and we ended up having massive fight in the playground. I was suspended and then I was moved forms. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Here, Jess uses violence in order to save face and defend the 'good name' she previously had in school. She feels rejected, angry and hurt that she was associated with the 'dirty, horrible, seedy world' of drugs. Utilising violence provided Jess with a means to 'stand up for herself'. However, in the process, she unwittingly excludes herself further by being

suspended and is consequently forced to move forms. Like Jess, a number of respondents reported experiencing a disjointed education as a result of their use of violence towards teachers and/or classmates. Not all participants enjoyed using violence and the connotations a violent reputation afforded:

...[being violent didn't feel] right good actually because like I were being bullied, and then with people calling me rocky then I were being a bully then, do you know what I mean? Sticking up for myself, standing up for myself, but then having to fight in the process to stand up for myself. So, it, then it felt like I were being a bully then, when it were me that was being bullied if you know what I mean. So, it didn't feel really nice to be honest. (Sally, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Respondents often viewed violence as being necessary; aggression was utilised only when all other options were spent. Mirroring Jack's (2001) findings, some women employed violent tactics as a last resort, when no other means of affecting others seemed to work:

She were name-calling me, I were name calling her back, I told her to stop it, she were warned to stop it three times, I walked away, it still didn't work, I came back in the room, she still carried on, and I ended up breaking her nose and giving her a black eye. (Sally, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Non group attendees were more likely to state that their use of violence was deserved and unavoidable, as Zoe and Kim demonstrate:

I mean I felt about the girl she deserved it, and at first I felt like I deserved it. And it wasn't until I took a step back that I thought 'well couldn't I have gone for a softer approach?' I look at it again and I think with the girl I couldn't have gone for a softer approach, she started on me, she bottled me, she was gonna use everything in her powers to *hurt* me. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

But that time of my life, living in a tower block I became *quite* violent because I felt like I had to. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

5.3 Violence as a survival strategy

Despite categorising themselves as bullies and/or perpetrators of violence, some respondents labelled themselves as victims (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). Occupying the dual identities of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', a number of women stated that they used violence as a coping strategy, as a tool to survive the trauma already experienced in their lives. As Kim explains:

I don't want to hurt people, but when I get angry and someone's gonna hurt me, it's my neck or theirs, they're getting it. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Having been severely attacked by a gang of girls during her youth, it would seem that 'lashing out' provided Kim with a means of venting hurt and anger, whilst also sending a message to opponents that she is not to be 'messed with'. It was often stated during group sessions that aggression was used as 'a defence mechanism to stop others from hurting them' (Field Diary 12.11.2008). It is possible that these women adopted a coping strategy for dealing with conflict that involved engaging in physical fights either to protect themselves or others. It would seem that they continued these coping strategies into adulthood and used physical and psychological violence as a method of communicating with others when they did not feel heard and/or when their needs were not being met. As with other studies (Thomas 2005) it was sometimes the case that women would fail to express their anger to the person they identified as the provocateur:

Erm, I know *how* to deal with things a lot better, instead of keeping things locked inside me and letting it all explode on a person that's nothing to do with it. (Sally, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

It would appear that Sally's fury was often displaced, as innocent victims faced the brunt of her angry emotions. Another group session attendee stated that she was an 'unstoppable force'; she described the 'feeling of having to get aggression out' (Field Diary 05.11.2008). Some respondents reported feeling a sense of frustration when their angry emotions were suppressed. 'Getting anger out' was seen as something a number of participants 'had' to do:

... [I've] gone carrying on down my mothers or in the street with people, just to get that rage out I think. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

A number of respondents reported using violence towards strangers in a public setting. One group member revealed that walking behind someone slow in the street serves to fuel her anger and forces her move one rung higher on the 'Anger Ladder' (see Appendix C). She explained that 'when I'm walking and someone's walking slowly in front of me, I just push them out of the way' (Field Diary 15.10.2008).

5.4 A history of abuse

Researchers have noted that those who engage in violence are also victimised more often than those who do not engage in violence (Artz 2004). The findings of this study followed the same patterns as those established by previous researchers in that some perpetrators reported high rates of victimisation and abuse. Many of the women reported that they often watched or were exposed to violence in their family of origin. It would seem that violence for a number of participants was a learned reaction:

But I got brought up with a lot of domestic violence, so I think you're almost like a sponge and you almost absorb it. I think I've kind of always reacted with violence. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

...You know I were battered off my mum and my brother was always hitting me all the time. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

...my mum used to beat me for *days* and leave me back and blue and leave me upstairs and lock me away so no-one could see me, you know (upset, in tears). (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

Most research has focused on women becoming/repeating the pattern set by their mothers and becoming the victim of violence by their partner. However this was not the case for participants in this sample. Some mothers were sometimes described as perpetrators; others were portrayed as both perpetrators and victims:

And I was *so* shocked cos I'd always said I'd never let a man do that to me, after what my mum went through (tears in her eyes). (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Many researchers have suggested that individuals who have a significant trauma history experience difficulty modulating their anger, which may be manifested in their use of violence (see Swan *et al.* 2005; Conradi *et al.* 2009). Other researchers suggest that women's use of both physical and psychological aggression is related to childhood abuse (Hamberger and Guise 2005; Hamby 2005; Magdol *et al.* 1997). Swan and Snow (2003) found that 'abused aggressors' (their term for dominant aggressors who also display significant victim history) are more likely to have experienced traumatic childhood abuse than other types of female offenders. Another study that compared women arrested for domestic violence with female victims in shelters found that the women who were arrested

and the women in shelters did not differ in terms of victimisation history (Abel 2001), indicating that the women arrested for domestic violence also had been abused extensively.

5.5 Violence used to protect others

In her study into the lives of violent schoolgirls Artz (1999) found that female perpetrators appear to have much in common with male perpetrators, the only significant difference being that male perpetrators display a higher level of fighting in defence of friends. However it is interesting to note this was not the case for this sample of perpetrators; many of whom would protect particularly friends and family at all costs:

I always protected [my sister] sort of thing, and to be honest she's the reason why I got into the majority of the fights. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

Through my life, I would never actually stand up for myself, but if somebody else were getting a bad deal I would open my mouth, and put my foot forward and, and I have, I have never gone around bopping anybody, but er, verbally I can, I can stand up. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

However, as already discussed in Chapter 5, this was not always the case for all respondents, as sibling rivalry was often cited as the cause of many confrontations:

Basically it's always been family issues what's made me angry, cos it's always one's better than the other, you know, one's got more than the other or one's worth more than the other. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, criminal record)

Respondents sometimes displayed manipulative, calculating behaviour, used solely to 'get their own way'. Jess describes the relationship with her parents as troubled and difficult during her adolescence:

Jess: [We had] massive [arguments], I never used to have arguments like teenage arguments, you know kind of 'you don't love me, you don't care about me' kind of thing. I was always quite manipulative

Sarah: In which way?

Jess: I would say things that I thought they wanted me to say, to pacify them and make them understand. And try and make them understand what their actions were doing, they were holding me back and making me worse [by not allowing me to drink and stay out with friends], I was trying to get that through to them. (Jess, 26-35, no group attendee, no criminal record)

5.6 A build-up of emotions

As with other studies (Stuart *et al.* 2006; Kimmel 2002; Babcock *et al.* 2003), the majority of respondents attributed their use of aggression to a build-up of emotions, for instance frustration, jealousy, anger and hurt. Jude described feeling a sense of overwhelming frustration and powerlessness at witnessing domestic violence and the ill-treatment of her mother:

And I used to get really violent towards [my mothers partner] as well, and towards my mum sometimes because I'd be so frustrated I'd put my hands through *windows* and I'd get so frustrated with him beating her up I would try and you know, try and come and beat him up too. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Jude's use of violence could be understood as an attempt to protect both herself and her mother, whilst also providing Jude with the opportunity to vent her frustrations. It is interesting that Jude also directs aggression towards her mother. Possibly this could be due to the fact she feels disappointed and saddened that her mother had become victimised in the relationship; it may be that Jude had lost all respect for her.

For some respondents there was a sense of their anger building up':

Because sometimes you forget about anger and you slip back into it, do you know what I mean, because it's so easy to come in and out of it. Because you're always building up over something, you know. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

It takes a lot to do it actually, it's a build up, I just go over and over things in my head, that's what I mean about not communicating, I just let it fester and fester. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Erm and the triggers are hurt, [my ex partner] *purposefully*, from my point of view, doing things that would upset me. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

Bela felt 'let down' by others, particularly by close friends and her ex-husband. During one group session, Bela declared that she mistakenly wears her 'heart on her sleeve' and thinks that she is too trusting of others (Field Diary 24.09.2008). She feels that her reliance on and high expectations of others ultimately cause her harm and distress. A pervasive theme of women's anger was powerlessness; similar to Thomas's study (2005) respondents wanted something or someone to change but they could not make this happen. It was not uncommon for women to say that others were not listening to their views (Field Diary 15.10.2008). Injustice also angered the participants, this included accounts of unfair or

disrespectful treatment and betrayal of trust (for example son lying or condescending behaviour).

Er what happened with my son was, for three months he'd been *really* bad, disrespecting people and whatever, and he disappeared. I'd gone looking for him, cos I were in a panic, and I ended up, when I found him, well when he came to the door, it were like I was *angry* but I were *hurt*. And it were like I gripped him in, and he were lying. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

In line with Thomas' (2005) analysis of women's anger and aggression, a number of interviewees listed the thoughtlessness of friends, family, work colleagues, partners and/or ex partners as precipitating violence. Any behaviour that deviated from respondent's own ideas regarding commitment and responsibility often triggered angry emotions:

And I expect people to be like me, to be with the programme, if you do a job, you do it right, you don't do things by halves. (Imogen, 36-45, group attendee, criminal record)

A lot of things get to me, anything. Like my ex, my ex partner or my other ex partner. Er, and the way, how he treated his son. [How he] turns the phone off, blanks him and doing whatever. (Afia, 35-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

As with Thomas' study (2005), women described situations in which they gave to others but did not receive, or needed support from others but did not get it. A frequent trigger of women's anger was the failure of partners and children to do their share of household chores (Field Diary 24.10.2008). Respondents also described feeling anxious by other people's stress:

I almost do feel that I have a duty of care towards him, cos I actually do know how he works, and I actually do know how to bring him back down off this big horse that he's riding at the moment, where he's upsetting everybody. And I guess some of my things this week, was that *it's my place to*. And I don't think that it is anymore because it brings me too much stress, and, and I need to disengage from the old life and get on with this one. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record).

Thus stress built up and respondent's shouldered many of these burdens because of their connectedness to their loved ones. However, these women often stated that they had no control over the events occurring in the lives of others. For some interviewees, these stresses continued to fuel a chronic, impotent kind of anger.

Consistent with other findings (Babcock *et al.* 2003; Stuart *et al.* 2008; Foran and O'Leary 2008) jealousy was also a common emotional motive for women's intimate partner violence:

Sarah: What triggers these [violent] reactions from you?

Sue: I think I was feeling insecure and I couldn't understand why [my partner] were with me. Er, always thought he were going to go off and leave me, stuff like that. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Interviewees often 'bottled' their emotions; where 'things' would 'fester and fester' (Sue, group attendee) and bad feeling would brew over a long period of time (Field Diary 15.10.2008). Some respondents could not easily 'let go' of their anger, as Afia stated 'I keep thinking about what happened over and over again'. Rather than expressing emotions, respondents often ruminated, rehashing perceived injustices which often generated further resentment. One group session attendee stated that she finds it very difficult to address her 'emotional baggage' and the issues that trigger her anger, as these have worked to shape her character and sense of 'self' (Field Diary 15.10.2008).

Common amongst the women was the sense of being unable to communicate emotions successfully without employing aggression. For Jude, violence was seen as the only available course of action to communicate strong emotions, and served as a much needed release:

...it's frustration as well. It's not being able to feel like I can get the message across. The only way you feel like you can actually get that across is by hitting somebody or by you know, like wanting to hurt them like you're hurting. It's the only way I can explain it really. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record).

According to Katz (1988) the emotions that seem to be most potent in fuelling violence are frustration, humiliation, shame, hurt and a need to redress a perceived imbalance of power. Anger was also directed inwards, as many interviewees described feeling extremely annoyed and frustrated with themselves for allowing others to 'get to them':

Also with the boys, I vented it, I took it out on the boys cos they said 'mum what's up with you? You're in a right mood' and I says 'cos I'm *angry*, I'm angry at myself, I'm angry at

somebody letting me, letting somebody get to me, for all this wasted energy'. (Imogen, 36-45, group attendee, criminal record)

Clearly Imogen perceived anger that did not produce the desired results as 'wasted energy'.

Other strong emotions included grief, loss and abandonment. Feeling deserted and abandoned by friends and family members left a number of respondents feeling hurt and unloved. Jude describes how as a child she was forced to live with her father as a result of her mother's new romantic relationship:

And I had to go live with my dad which was quite unsettling, especially for a twelve year old because I was kind of reaching puberty and it was, I did feel quite abandoned actually (tears fill her eyes). (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

For one respondent in particular, feelings of loneliness and abandonment helped to fuel her anger and aggression:

I wanted to go out with [my siblings], but they never wanted to take the ginger one out, they always wanted to take the black child out, cos I've got a mixed race brother and a mixed race sister. And they always wanted to take them out, they never wanted to take me out. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

5.7 Losing and asserting control.

As we have seen the emotions that prompt violence are varied and often involve a loss of control. It is important to note however that this sense of losing control is perceived by many of the respondents as a negative aspect of their violence. A number of women described feeling angry and upset because they had reacted with aggression during previous altercations. For example, Bela stated that she cannot discuss her angry emotions and behaviours with her mother as 'things like this never happen to her' (Field Diary 01.10.2008). Clearly Bela believes that the feelings she experiences are unique to her. As a result, she perceives herself to have failed 'as a woman' and consequently feels isolated and despondent. Bela considers these 'things' which 'happen to her' to be out of control, and feels utterly humiliated by her seemingly irrepressible angry behaviour.

This loss of control is described by one respondent as illogical but as we shall discuss shortly it may be used to assert a form of control.

I react with anger to quite a lot of things that most people would take logically. I mean (laughs) it seems to be my first outlet in any hurtful or stressful situations. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

This is consistent with other research. Indeed, women who were arrested for intimate partner violence in Stuart *et al.* (2006) endorsed reasons for aggression related to losing self-control, including 'because your partner provoked you or pushed you over the edge' and 'because you didn't know what to do with your feelings'. Thus violence was used when participants feared their control was breaking down, they felt compelled to use explicit violence to 'restore' control. Ronfeldt, Kimerling and Arias (1998) noted this association and found that college students who were unsatisfied with the amount of power they had in their relationship were the most likely to use violence (cited in Frieze 2005: 233). In reality as Connell notes in relation to men 'violence is a part of a system of domination, but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection' (Connell 1995: 84 cited in Kimmel 2002: 1352).

Indeed, some respondents displayed very controlled aggression as we shall see shortly but also a desire to repress/control their emotions. Bela described how when she was at work she had to go to the toilet to cry. She became quite upset when talking of this, her voice was rising and she was clearly very upset about it. Kathy stated that if it got that bad where she had to cry in work, then it really is bad, and she needs to do something about her situation (Field Diary 24.09.2008)

In spite of considerable involvement in fighting, most participants tended to hold negative attitudes towards their own use of violence (particularly group attendees). They saw themselves as 'nice', 'lovely' and 'good':

I don't want to do bad things *at all*. You know, I don't want to be nasty, I don't want to hurt people, I don't want to, even shouting and saying nasty things, you know? (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

I am a lovely person, this is the thing about the balance of it all. All my friends love me, I've got no family, but my friends say I can be really nice, but I'm very, very fiery, like I'm always loosing it, I'm always *stressed*, I'm always you know, I let things get to me in them sort of ways. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

Similar to other studies (Thomas 2005), respondents perceived angry outbursts as

emanating from the 'not self'; the unrecognisable self. Almost as if describing a dissociative episode, a number of women spoke incredulously of 'out of character' aggressive behaviours:

...when my voice changes, when I'm shouting my voice goes *really* deep and loud, and I know then I'm gonna start doing bad things. I can't help it. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

When I get angry I think I'm like walking with the devil, you know, and I don't want to walk with the devil. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record)

The women at times described their behaviour as being 'crazy', frenzied and 'uncontrolled'. It would appear that for Afia, her behaviour stemmed from a compulsion to act, as if swept up by a demonic force. In line with other findings (Jack 2001), women described being 'out of control' through statements such as 'I had PMS' (Field Diary 17.09.2008) and 'I didn't mean to'. In this way participants externalise blame for their own violence and disclaim ownership of their anger; they 'disavow responsibility for their actions and do not openly discuss the interpersonal reasons for its arousal' (Jack 2001: 393). For some interviewees, their violent behaviour roused both fear and upset:

Erm, when I say violent to my sister, I just used to, kids stuff, *kids* stuff. *There* (pointing towards the timeline) [when I hit my husband] I really scared myself. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

But when I go, it looks like I'm on drugs, but when I'm fighting I don't shake, I *do not* even quiver like. I don't know, I feel like my body turns to iron or something, cos when I get hit it don't *hurt* until like twenty, you know, like once I've calmed down I'll be like 'oh god' it's when I start to realise that I've hurt here and I've hurt there, but I don't care. And that scares me in a way, *my body* can't make me feel getting hit, you know and that's not good. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

And that scares the hell out of me, I don't want to fuck up my relationship, you know what I mean. I don't want to do that to somebody who's really not violent themselves. But he's not, he's been really good for me. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

More often than not, respondents feared what they were capable of and what they might do if the "wrong" circumstances occurred.

Violence was also explicitly acknowledged and used to gain control by some respondents. For them it is clear that violence at times could be motivated instrumentally by the desire to control. However, in line with other studies (Kimmel 2002) the use of violence sometimes seemed to indicate not the experience of control but the loss of control. While

some respondents used aggression to increase their feelings of control or power, others attributed their aggression to a lack of control over their emotions and themselves:

I just got to the end of my tether. You know, he'd pushed me to the limit. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

Not all participants described their behaviour as 'uncontrolled':

I feel in control, like I know that, say if I were going to fight you, I know I'd grab you by the throat and I'd hit you. And I *know* the next thing I'm going to do. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Interestingly, non group attendees were more likely to admit that their use of violence was calculated, rational, deliberate, pre-planned and intended:

I felt I always had to be on guard. You know I always had to, like I wouldn't drink that much, just in case, what if I got too pissed and then somebody beat me cos I were drunk? (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

You know I think you can find different ways to manage it, and I'd like to get to the point where I felt like I could honestly put my hand on my heart and say that 'I can totally control my behaviour'. Yeah I feel that at the moment I've gained a lot of control over the years, but I still feel like I could potentially go there. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Afia, who had only attended two sessions maintained:

Afia: And over the years, I do say *if* I was out and someone started then I would proper lose it, but it takes a lot to do that. I'd rather wait til I was sober

Sarah: What do you mean?

Afia: I mean I'll try and override it or I'll laugh, I don't wanna fight when I'm drunk. It's in the morning when I wake up and I want trouble now, I'll come up to you. Come outside, and it's a shock.

In this context it was also clear from respondents that control meant ensuring other people respected them.

I mean my attitude is if someone looks at me like that I'll say 'what the *fuck* are you looking at?' You know, and I won't think twice about saying that, and then if they want to carry on, then come on outside. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

Like I can't just walk away, I have got to get my point across. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

And his dad didn't want to know, just laughed at me, but you can't laugh at me when I'm mad. So I ended up throwing the phone, and it ended up going into the side of his (son's) head. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record).

Some respondents saw violence in a relationship as a signifier of caring. As noted in previous research there is some evidence to suggest that women's aggression is a reflection of dysfunctional attempts to establish emotional closeness to their partner (Dutton and Goodman 2005). Fiebert and Gonzalez (1997) found that women reported using abusive tactics to obtain their partner's attention and to attempt to engage them. This finding seems to mirror the attitudes and behaviours of a number of participants in this study. For Jess, her violence was used paradoxically as a tool to affirm her partner's caring and love:

...and in a way I wanted [my partner] to hit me, and that was the case with all my ex boyfriends after that because I *feel* that when they hit me they care about me. And I know that's not the case, but with Bryan I used to really goad him into hitting me, and he did a few times. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Indeed, it would seem that Jess' objective was to attain the attention of her partner, not to cause injury. For her, violence was associated with caring. This narrative seems to be in agreement with other studies (Jack 2001; Graham-Kevan and Archer 2005) that cite a desire to prove one's love, to get attention and to connect with another as reasons for using violence against a partner. Swan and Snow (2003) also found in their research that thirty eight per cent of female perpetrators threatened to use violence to 'make their partners do the things they wanted'. This is consistent with Stuart *et al.*'s (2006) analysis of women arrested for violence, where 'to feel more powerful', 'to get control', 'get your partner to do something or stop doing something' and 'to make your partner agree with you' were strong motives for violence. For Anne, behaving in a 'naughty way' served to attract others attention and love:

You gather blame, and you gather, you want some love, but you never, you don't seem to get it, so you do naughty things, and that's what I was doing. (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

5.8 Enjoyment of violence

A key finding from the research is that some women enjoyed being violent. It is clear for example that for Jude much satisfaction was gleaned from her ability to harm others; to inflict the same suffering that she herself feels.

Sarah: Was it enjoyable?

Jude: In a really sadistic way probably yeah, in a kind of like, in terms of a game, getting a bit behind it, yeah I think it's the endorphins (laughs). And the fact that I'd let it happen to me without reacting, it felt good that I was actually standing up for myself. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Women's self-reports indicate that bringing violence into situations can sometimes create feelings of well-being and empowerment, particularly when the anger produces perceived positive results (Jack 2001).

I always stuck up for myself. I think in the long run it made me stronger, but at the time [when I was bullied] I felt really bad. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

In line with other research (Thomas 2005), violence involved a sense of power when anger was effectively used to restore justice, respect and/or relationship reciprocity:

...then one day I just turned around and got a big fucking plank of wood, and just like started hitting him with it. You know that kind of brought the relationship to a new level, as soon as he would get angry and violent, I would react straight back and hit him with anything I could find you know. It was really self destructive violent behaviour, you know he would dominate me violently and then I would (pause) get violent back. Or sometimes I would initiate it and get violent towards him first. Our relationship had kind of like crossed a line where that behaviour became acceptable. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Similar to other studies (Katz 1988), some perpetrators described being drawn further into violence by the exciting dimensions of participating in violent behaviour. A number of interviewees experienced a need to attack, constructing the opponent as the cause of displeasure. This engendered a heightened sense of excitement and passion, along with a compulsion to engage in violence until that passion was spent:

...Sometimes I stop, you know, like if I've got blood on me, that's when I'm like 'oh'. You know, but other than that, I don't know. I don't know if it's like I've run out of fuel or when my conscience thinks I've done enough. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

In revealing what it felt like to engage in violence, a number of respondents talked about excitement, adrenaline rushes and the feeling of 'getting pumped':

Erm, I almost felt empowered, I almost felt like erm I was standing up for myself. I wasn't going to let this happen to me anymore and it was like, standing up for myself. Yeah I felt

strong, yeah I felt good almost. You kind of get an adrenaline rush when you're angry and it's like a release. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Respondents described the anger and rage they felt towards their opponents, and the sense of well-being and power they experienced when they had 'beaten someone up'. Although violence sometimes provided a sense of power, benefits were short lived, as participants were often filled with intense guilt following the event:

Sarah: Do you find enjoyment in fighting?

Sue: Erm, I wouldn't say enjoyment (pause) it helps to release certain things I suppose, like where things have built up, once you kick off and get them all out you feel better. You feel better at first, but then afterwards you think 'well, why did I do that?' or 'that shouldn't have happened' and I *really* need to talk to somebody, that's a hard one. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Most respondents did not agree with/condone 'senseless' fighting, fighting for the 'fun of it' but some had indulged in it':

I thought it was one of [my brothers] friends, found out that it was some random lad that he'd asked me to kick. If it was his friend it wouldn't have bothered me that much, but the fact that it was, my brother didn't know him and got me to kick him just for the fun of it, it's not alright. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

5.9 Responding to being a "victim" of violence.

Not all respondents could be described as victims of male violence. Like Fiebert and Gonzalez's study (1997), participants frequently described their violence towards male partners as being 'harmless' and/or having little effect in comparison. Several participants saw themselves as being a 'victim' at the hands of a violent male partner:

No, no I don't think he [ex partner] was scared of me, cos if I went to go for him he'd rather slap me back or hold me, and restrain me. So I don't think he was scared of me, I was *definitely* scared of him. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, no criminal record)

Most interviewees had experienced significant violence from their partners. This echoes Caldwell *et al.*'s (2009) findings, where 90 per cent of participants experienced physical aggression from partners, 95 per cent experienced coercive control, and 53 per cent were sexually victimised. A finding that is consistent across studies of female violence is that women are usually violent in the context of victimisation (see Dasgupta 2002; Hamberger

and Guise 2002; Magdol *et al.* 1997; Swan and Snow 2002). Participants in this study were sometimes only violent if they were 'hit first':

... [My partner] was dragging me around the flat by my hair. And then just little things like that kept happening, and then one day I just turned around and got a big fucking plank of wood, and just like started hitting him with it. You know that kind of brought the relationship to a new level, as soon as he would get angry and violent, I would react straight back and hit him with anything I could find you know. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

It seems here that Jude uses aggression to convey the message to her partner that she is not a 'doormat', that there will be violent consequences if she is injured or harmed (Thomas 2005). This is in line other research (Stuart *et al.* 2006; Swan and Snow 2002; Swan and Snow 2003) which reveals that self-defence is the most frequently endorsed motive for violence by women. Some participants' experiences seemed to correspond with feminist arguments (Dobash and Dobash. 1992). For some women, their perpetration of relationship violence occurred as a reaction to a male partner's pattern of aggression. This accord with Campbell's (1993) findings, participants used force to defend themselves against acquaintance and especially to defend themselves and their children in domestic violence cases. Dobash and Dobash (1992) suggest that female behaviour does not carry the 'malevolent intent of male actions', that is, when females use violence, it is almost always 'in defence of self and children in response to cues of imminent assault in the past and in retaliation for previous physical abuse' (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 80):

It was horrendous, erm, shouting, drunken behaviour, goading, if [my husband] couldn't get a rise out of me, he's go pick on the kids, cos he knew then that I'd protect them and that he could get something. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

It was just, if anybody looked at us the wrong way, or anyone said anything about my daughter, even though they didn't mean it, I know they did mean it. And I thought 'no, I'm not gonna let anyone talk about my daughter like that'. It was like the demon trapped inside us, that was really getting us aggressive and all that. (Helcn, 36-45, Together Women client, criminal record)

Violence was also seen as a reaction to other people's attitudes and behaviours:

So it's the bounce off him that gives me it. (Jane, 26-35, group attendee, no criminal record)

When Jane felt that her children were in imminent danger of bodily harm at the hands of her violent husband, Jane felt justified in using force to protect them. Here Jane also

affirms that she is a 'good mother' who protects her children at all costs. Saunders (1986) found that if women use violence it is more likely to be against a violent partner than a nonviolent one. However this was not true for two participants in this study:

But he's never been violent or anything like that, my partner now, *never*. Which is where the guilt comes in and stuff, he must be some sort of saint (laughs). (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

And we had a couple of instances where I'd shove him or I might (pause) not punch him so much, but more just like shoves or because he knows what I've been like he won't let anything like that happen. He's like 'no way'. But there have been a couple of times where we have had violent incidences erm, but it's a long time ago and it's always, it's me that instigated it, and him that says 'stop'. So we don't have a violent relationship. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

However, it is interesting to note that at times women also initiated violent episodes:

A lot of the time yeah, but there were other times when I would just kick off. But a lot of the time it was in self defence. I think first time it happened it were in self defence. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

... Sometimes I could just sit there having a drink with [my partner] or my mum and dad and that would be it. They didn't have to say anything, I'd just go on one. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

Earlier studies have found that a relatively small number of women used intimate partner violence for the purposes of intimidation. Stuart *et al.* (2006) found that women used violence 'to scare or frighten' partners 11 per cent of the time.

5.10 Alcohol as a trigger of violence

Research has shown that alcohol misuse and intimate partner violence are significantly associated with one another (see Artz 1999; Conradi *et al.* 2009). Respondent's consumption of alcohol played a significant role in their perpetration of violence:

...if I just had that little drink *more* I'd just go mad at anybody, and it were really strange. And I realised when I'm *not* drinking that I don't get angry. It's strange how drink turns you nasty. Some people it just makes them merry and have a laugh, and me, it just sends me potty. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

I just drank and drank and drank and drank. Going out like a psycho warrior bitch, going out there and just kicking off. (Imogen, 36-45, group attendee, criminal record)

Often violence took place when both parties were using alcohol. Studies with incident-specific measures generally have shown that alcohol use by the perpetrator and the victim increases the risk for intimate partner violence (see Thompson and Kingree 2006). It has been suggested that alcohol has its effect by disinhibiting behaviour in individuals with aggressive tendencies (Boyatzis 1975). Interestingly alcohol was used by one respondent as an excuse to be physically aggressive; as a tool to be violent rather than passive:

But when I'd had a drink, I don't know, maybe it gave me a bit of confidence inside me, and know that I could feel like I could stick up for myself. When I didn't have a drink, when he were drinking I were on tenterhooks, and I were like 'is he gonna start?' So I felt better having a drink, so I that I could control, not control myself, but maybe not feel the pain if he hit me. So (pause) that's why I suppose I had a drink really, just so I knew that he couldn't do it to me, or if he were gonna, I'm in the same state of mind as him. (Emma, 18-25, group attendee, criminal record)

The quote above highlights the difficulty in tracing the causal relationship between alcohol and violence. Here it is hard to determine causality, does alcohol cause violence or is it a consequence of violence? Alcohol abuse may be a response to being attacked; a coping strategy as well as a causal factor of violence. Some researchers have argued that the association between alcohol use and violence may vary considerably depending on individual characteristics and the circumstances under which intoxication occurs (see Bo Vatnar and Bjorkly 2008). In reality the study of the link between alcohol and violence is methodologically complex. However, it is interesting to note that alcohol did not have the same disastrous effect on all participants:

Alcohol, I don't really get angry with alcohol, now and again I'll have an argument with my boyfriend but I don't really get angry and violent with alcohol, it's more like with drugs, or a combination of the alcohol and the drugs. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

5.11 Material Constraints and External Pressure.

For a number of respondents, anxieties around payment of utility bills were ever-present. One group session attendee felt infuriated that her landlord was slow to repair her broken boiler, and had been living without hot water and heating for weeks (Field Diary 05.11.2008). For unemployed respondents, a lack of money caused a great deal of pressure and tension within intimate relationships (Field Diary 24.09.2008).

Being a single parent, Bela described single-headedly undertaking all household chores

and called herself 'little miss busy' (Field Diary 17.09.2008). Bela described struggling to complete domestic tasks and stated that 'one hand can't clap' (Field Diary 17.09.2008). Receiving empathetic responses from fellow group session members, many women talked of feeling undervalued as household chores were often not split fairly.

For other respondents violence was not simply a "normal" feature of their lives but could also be an expectation, or even a form of family entertainment. Interestingly two participants described being coerced against their will into utilising violence for the pleasure and entertainment of others:

When I was younger, my brother, I lived by his word, I would really do what he told me. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Cos when we were kids my dad used to get us to fight for his enjoyment do you know what I mean, like watching a wrestling match or something like that? That were what my dad used to do, get me and my brother fighting, and he used to sit and watch us. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record).

In trying to understand women's' use of violence it seems there are numerous pressures and daily stresses that affect some women.

5.12 Drugs and violence.

Four of the eighteen women interviewed admitted that drugs had helped trigger their violent behaviour. In line with previous research (Conradi *et al.* 2009) substance abuse had a major role to play in participant's use of violence:

...when I used to do speed and stuff. When I was on a come down I'd be so dark and I'd just feel really, really *needy*. And if I didn't get what I needed then I'd get really angry. So I think because I was extremely needy and really fragile, I could break a lot easier, I could get angry a lot easier. (Jude, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

... [my partner] were an alcoholic and I were a, using amphetamines all the time and we'd just clash, we used to fight like fuck, excuse my language (smiles). We used to tear stripes off each other, I've thrown him down stairs and he's thrown me down the stairs, erm locked each other out of the house, carried on in street. (Sue, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

The lower prevalence of substance abuse in this study may reflect underreporting due to social desirability; respondents, particularly group attendees may have been less likely to

admit to using illegal drugs. Interestingly, drug taking did not have negative consequences for all participants. Interviewees described taking drugs (pills, coke and speed) for recreational purposes.

...then I'd come home, have some more coke and then I'd go out, every night I'd be out somewhere but it was at [the] Blues Clubs. I would *always* get into some kind of argument (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

From the point of view of Jess, her drug taking took place within certain socially acceptable boundaries, in the 'rave scene' and in Blues Clubs (a term used by Jess to describe terrace houses she frequented where music was played and alcohol/drugs were sold illegally). One participant expressed an interest in drugs over alcohol. As with Artz's study (1999) the relaxing effects of marijuana were described as having a smoothing, calming effect and were sometimes used to quell anger and stop violence:

And it's like now, I smoke weed, you know and now if I get really angry I'll just smoke a spliff and calm down, you know, take myself away from everything. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Weed just makes me tired, pills and coke I used to do when I were going out in town. (Jo, 18-25, Together Women client, criminal record)

In another case drugs were used to 'cope' with trauma:

I never told anyone about the rape, not until I was about twenty four. Erm (pause) so I never told anybody and my way of dealing with it was to take drugs. I mean it was a different world and I felt in control, I didn't have to think about horrible things. So I think that's why I got into drugs. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Other women interviewed in this study were taking anti-depressants.

I used to be *lonely* and angry, angry and upset, not knowing, confused, frustrated, feeling all those things at once is hard, like a full belly all the time, where I just eat with depression, eating and getting bigger, and then you put yourself down thinking 'oh who wants me anyway? (Anne, 26-35, former group attendee, no criminal record)

During one group session Imogen admitted that she began taking anti-depressants since experiencing post-natal depression. Imogen described feeling intensely angry and anxious as a result of discontinuing the medication (Field Diary 15.10.2008). Consequently we can see that the relationship between drug consumption and violence is not straight-forward for

the women in this study. In some cases it seems to fuel violence in others to help respondents to moderate their behaviours.

Conclusion

Whilst some violent women their use of violence has a rationale, albeit a complex one. The majority of participants grew up in economically depressed areas where, for a number of women, fighting was commonplace. Indeed, some participants had a background of family and relationship experiences that included extensive exposure to abuse and violence. Alcohol and drug problems were rife among this sample of female perpetrators. Like Thomas' (2005) study, this research negates several myths, for example that women do not know when they are angry. Obviously some participants in this study knew when they were angry and thoroughly enjoyed the rush of adrenaline associated with violence. This study also revealed that women constructively use their anger, although admittedly these were not as frequently reported as episodes that produced embarrassment, shame and/or guilt (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). For a number of respondents, anger appeared to be soundly based in interpersonal interactions in which women were denied power or resources and/or treated unjustly. For other participants, violence was utilised instrumentally in order to control and dominate others, to obtain revenge and as a strategy of survival. Participants displayed both expressive and instrumental forms of violence; for a number of women their aggression was an isolated expression of frustration and anger, but for other interviewees, their violence was part of a systematic pattern of control and fear.

Respondents typically had multiple motives for their behaviour (Fiske 2004). Indeed, the statements 'I have a lot of trouble controlling my anger' and 'I become violent when I'm blind drunk' seems at odds with the view that women lash out at others only when they are defending themselves or their children against 'imminent assault' (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 80). For example:

Two of my friends had to take me off her. And I were even getting in a fight with them and it's like I can't stop. If someone wants to stop me doing what I'm doing then I'll go for them too, you know. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Like Richardson (2005) this research produced results that are inconsistent with the widely held assumption of female passivity. Women were not likely to inhibit aggressive responding if such behaviour seemed justified or as a response to an attack from another. Rather than operating according to a norm of passivity, the women in this research seemed to follow what is stereotypically considered to be a male-focused 'norm' of reciprocity. This applies in the context of interactions with strangers as well as in the more specific case of intimate violence. It needs to be stressed that there was, in general but not completely, a difference in the way that non-attendees and attendees responded and explain their violence. Following on from this, the next chapter will focus on the service providers the Together Women and S.T.O.P 'treatment' programmes.

Chapter 6: Managing anger: the impact of ‘treatment’ upon female perpetrators

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter which explored how violence shapes women’s identity and the ‘rules’ of violence employed by perpetrators, it is the intention of this chapter to shed light on how violent women experience and perceive the Together Women and S.T.O.P ‘treatment’ programmes. The narratives of S.T.O.P group attendees rather than Together Women clients will be primarily focused upon, purely because more time was spent observing S.T.O.P group sessions. This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section is centred upon experiences of ‘treatment’ from the perspective of key informants. The second section focuses upon group counselling, the notion of ‘S.T.O.P talk’ amongst group attendees and the idea that participants of this study seemed to be both victims and perpetrators of violence. The ways in which narratives of key informants at times directly contradicted the narratives of some female perpetrators will also be explored. To conclude, this chapter argues that more needs to be known about the context of women’s lives before effective interventions can be made.

6.1 Background

Offending behaviour programmes for male domestic violence perpetrators emerged as a result of campaigns by women’s advocates in the 1970’s (Bowen and Gilchrist 2004a). A number of different theoretical approaches have been employed by perpetrator ‘treatment’ groups, however, most programmes tend to be based upon the feminist model developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota (see Pence and Paymar 1993). The Duluth Model presupposes that physical violence is a result of patriarchy and part of a spectrum of male efforts to control women (Babcock *et al.* 2003). Although ‘treatment’ programmes commonly help address issues around anger management, they also focus upon stress control and improving communication skills. The ‘treatment’ provided at S.T.O.P is described by the Director as ever-changing; the project pooling resources and a wide range of ideas from a number of sources worldwide:

People in this line of work at the moment are not taking perpetrators seriously as you would expect, but there is a fair bit of sharing going on between agencies. And there's lots of stuff [used by S.T.O.P] that's Canadian and American, the original project was the Duluth project and that was over twenty years ago. (Kathy, S.T.O.P Director)

Several studies have found that completing perpetrator 'treatment' programmes has been associated with very little reduction in re-offending (see Davis and Taylor 1999; Babcock *et al.* 2003). The issue of whether all offenders react in the same way to anger management programmes has come under much scrutiny (Lindsay and Brady 2002). Indeed, studies suggest that 'treatment' may not have clear-cut outcomes upon the lives and behaviours of male perpetrators (Bowen and Gilchrist 2004b). Increasingly it is believed that a 'one size fits all' approach to 'treatment' fails to recognise the diversity of male perpetrators that enter treatment (Healey *et al.* 1998). However, it is argued that effective programmes are based on the contention that perpetrator thinking can be trained through reflection and critique to reduce offending (Kalinowska 1995; Zust 2006). Such 'treatment' programmes are founded on the principle that self-evaluation can reduce the likelihood of recidivism, 'yet questions surround the presentation of cognitive restructuring programmes aimed at assisting in instilling new evaluative frameworks and how these mesh with offenders own understandings' (Hochstetler *et al.* 2010: 496). In comparison to the vast amount of research on male abusers and offending behaviour programmes, relatively little is known about the circumstances of aggressive women and how they respond to 'treatment' (Abel 2001). This study helps bridge this gap in knowledge.

6.2 The S.T.O.P programme

S.T.O.P holds separate weekly anger management groups for both male and female perpetrators. It is recommended that perpetrators attend these group sessions for at least twelve weeks. The groups are 'intended for people who have committed acts of violence against friends or partners and who recognise that this is damaging their relationships. It is also for those who fear that their anger could get out of control and that they could attack other people' (Be Safe: a self help guide for perpetrators of domestic abuse/anger management 2008: 3). The main focus of the programme is upon the violence between couples in a relationship, but the basic ideas can be extended to include any kind of relationship where anger is in danger of producing violence. Officially S.T.O.P does not

distinguish between male and female perpetrators; the handouts and group exercises do not use gender specific language. A number of clients have complex clinical diagnoses, ranging from borderline personality disorder to bipolar disorder. Some of S.T.O.P's work entailed interacting with probation services, social services, alcohol and substance use services as well as housing and mental health services. Each S.T.O.P customer is required to complete a self-assessment test. The test is scored to determine the client's offending history and levels of violence. S.T.O.P focuses on verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, spiritual and financial abuse (for definitions of violence used by S.T.O.P see Appendix C). S.T.O.P clients are expected to read and complete the exercises in the 'Be Safe: a self help guide for perpetrators of domestic abuse/anger management' booklet. It is stressed that attending S.T.O.P is not a quick fix. Commitment and a willingness to change violent, habitual behaviour are imperative.

Paying more attention to cognitive-behavioural 'treatment', S.T.O.P concentrates upon issues such as anger management, including identifying signs that precede violence and techniques for controlling aggression. The focus is upon increasing awareness of anger, its consequences and of highlighting alternative roles, scripts and behaviours. There is also an emphasis on learning relational skills and on confidence and assertiveness building (see Appendix C for further examples of group session activities). The booklet states that the aim of S.T.O.P is not to 'cure', but to 'teach the ways of managing anger so that violence is avoided as far as possible'. The idea of choice runs like a thread throughout the programme. It is claimed that the tendency to be violent can be managed because in the end, individuals make the decision to be violent. S.T.O.P insists that actions are the result of choices; group facilitators stress that one can only control one's own behaviour, not the actions of others. The focus does not seem to be on the context surrounding violent incidents. Once learnt, group facilitators stress that the anger management exercises must be used throughout a person's lifetime. Similar to Andrews and Bonta (1994) who identified 'criminogenic attitudes' as their primary predictor of criminal behaviour, a cognitive distortion model of criminal offending was used by S.T.O.P. According to the cognitive distortion model, 'successful rehabilitation would require that offenders be taught to recognise and change their criminogenic thought patterns' (Henning and Frueth 1996: 526). In reality, the success of S.T.O.P depends wholly on whether the client

recognises and accepts anger as a personal 'problem' and is actively invested in anger reduction.

Group sessions involved perpetrators taking turns to discuss their violent behaviour. Each weekly session began with a 'check-in' during which clients reported recent risky violent situations, their thoughts and feelings at the time regarding the matter, and ideally new ways of thinking to avoid aggressive behaviour. Violent thoughts and behaviours were 'treated' by asking group members to dissect the thought processes behind violence in order to identify patterns that put them at risk of violent behaviour. S.T.O.P requires members to try to understand their own and one another's behaviour, and to identify unhelpful violent 'old ways of thinking'. Reading and re-reading the 'Be Safe' booklet is seen by group facilitators as key; the aim is to replace old patterns of violent behaviour with ways of thinking endorsed by S.T.O.P and the criminal justice system. As offenders develop insight into their thinking they receive assistance in developing 'tools' and techniques (such as the Anger Ladder and taking 'Time Out') that modify or counteract these violent thought patterns and reshape 'the self' (see Appendix C for group exercises and anger management techniques).

Dealing with the consequences of crime and breaking the cycle of offending behaviour has been promoted as a community responsibility. In recent years there has been renewed concern about the 'revolving door' of prison and strategies to facilitate offender re-entry to their communities have been proposed (Eliason 2006). Initiatives have sought to incorporate the community in combating crime, in order to encourage self-help and active co-operation or even partnership with the formal agencies of crime control. In so doing, 'they seek to dispel the idea that crime is the problem of government, to be dealt with away from the community's gaze' (Lacey and Zedner 1995: 302). As an apparatus of the state, the criminal justice system has its own rationale and body of knowledge that determine its activities. The rhetoric of criminal justice is littered with individualistic and psychological constructions of 'the self' as wilful. In her research on a 'cognitive self change' prison programme Fox (1999) explored specifically how prison structures employ power to convince prisoners they had a faulty self that could only be 'fixed' once they came to terms with the fact that they were essentially flawed people. This was achieved through emphasising the violent nature of prisoner's thoughts, feelings and actions. As with Fox's

study (1999), group facilitators at S.T.O.P regularly required the group members to de-contextualise the behaviours that resulted in their use of violence. In these attempts to influence women's understandings of their own violence, the discourse used by S.T.O.P and Together Women is an example of governmental power constructing new 'selves'. Only by conceiving a 'self' that claimed personal and unmitigated responsibility for one's violent actions (by internalising a definition of violence created by S.T.O.P) could group members begin to work toward correcting their spoiled status in the eyes of the criminal justice system. This relates to Garland's notion of penal 'technologies of the self' (1997), where willing offenders are assimilated to the stipulations of prison and probation regimes. 'Techniques of correction stress the offender's responsibility for his or her criminal actions and insist that he/she must address and take responsibility for them' (Garland 1997: 191). Indeed, clients at both S.T.O.P and Together Women are held accountable for their own rehabilitation. Group attendees are expected to responsibly exercise autonomy in a way that is socially approved and legally sanctioned. In this way, these discourses are repressive in spite of their emphasis on choice. The notion of 'self-change' 'suggests a process whereby group members 'participate in their own confession and reform' (Fox 1999: 89). Thus, the rhetoric of the programme is disciplinary yet highlights the women's active and willing collaboration. The confessional formats of perpetrator group sessions illustrate a particular 'regime of truth': 'one that emphasizes self-knowledge and supports the state's disciplinary mechanism' (Foucault 1980 cited in Fox 1999: 92)

6.3 Pathways to 'treatment'

As with the 'Families without Fear' programme¹, the majority of perpetrators contacted S.T.O.P because they did not feel comfortable with the way they were behaving towards others. Group attendees felt fearful of intimate relationships breaking down; damaging effects on the family were strong motivators towards change:

... [Attending group sessions] made me feel a new person, it made me feel 'I can do this, I don't need that anger, I can't do [violence] no more cos I have got my daughter'. (Anne, 26-35, S.T.O.P group attendee, no criminal record)

¹ The Families without Fear programme is part of Respect. It provides innovative domestic abuse intervention programmes for male and female perpetrators and victims from all over London and beyond.

For other respondents, having the capacity to murder and the fear of causing irrevocable damage encouraged attendance at the centres. As Helen explains:

I was so violent at the time, if I had done someone, I would have seriously done them in. They wouldn't have been getting up at all, and I would have been lifted [arrested] for murder or something. (Helen, 36-45, Together Women client, criminal record)

Although this was not the case for all group attendees, as Afia seemingly paid no heed to the consequences of her actions:

...I'd come tear at you and laugh. I fought a copper. When I'm on one and I'm not bothered, like I said, police could come to my door for whoever, and I just don't care. (Afia, 36-45, S.T.O.P group attendee, criminal record)

Indeed, Daniels and Murphy (1997) noted that clinical experience, high attrition rates and research findings suggest that the majority of offenders who attend 'treatment' do so in response to a breakdown of relationships. Not all S.T.O.P clients were self referred: a number of interviewees stated that GPs, social services, probation, friends and family had suggested they attended S.T.O.P perpetrator group sessions. Two interviewees initially identified themselves as victims and attended the S.T.O.P support group, until it was ascertained that they needed help managing their own anger. In spite of the voluntary nature of the S.T.O.P programme, attendance was often 'enforced' upon respondents. Many women were involved with the criminal justice system and the threat of a prison sentence, family breakdown and/or the loss of custody of a child loomed near. Technically voluntary, the S.T.O.P programme fits Peyrot's (1985) notion of 'coerced voluntarism'. As one key informant maintained:

...often with women, because they've got the children they just think 'well I've got to [attend S.T.O.P] cos I've got the children, I've got to do'. (Sarah, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions, 36-45, no criminal record)

Indeed, the voluntary-involuntary dichotomy is not straightforward (Fox 1999). Although Foucault (1997) depicts individuals as active participants in their own self-correction, their 'willingness' stems from their acceptance of dominant discourses that insist upon the distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. In this instance, the women who attend both S.T.O.P and Together Women group sessions are compelled to accept and adopt gendered definitions of violence and 'normality' used by the criminal justice system in order to

avoid losing custody of their children and/or forfeit the various social services and resources provided by the centres. In reality, the deviant woman's 'meanings' about 'the self' were defined through interaction with the criminal justice system. Group attendees had to 'see' themselves as 'abnormal' in order to succeed and become 'normal'. Nonetheless, the clash between group attendee discourse and S.T.O.P/Together Women discourse seems inevitable. Simply typifying victims as 'good' and violent acts as 'bad' is perhaps an inadequate interpretation of the dilemmas that these women face.

6.4 Risk assessments and group session exercises

One of the issues raised in this study was that the documentation used by S.T.O.P and Together Women created fixed narratives about the women's 'selves' rather than about their experience, attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, 'risk assessments and anger management strategies tend to constitute the subjectivity of the person whose risk is being assessed' (Pollack *et al.* 2010: 1271). Through making use of the 'Be Safe' self help booklet and self-assessment questionnaires provided by S.T.O.P and Together Women, respondents have to frame their 'personal narratives' in this 'vocabulary', applying a fixed statement to their attitudes and behaviours (Gubrium and Holstein 1998: 175). As Garland (1997) notes, when risk assessment tools are not individually tailored, but are based upon top-down assumptions about what constitutes risk and violent behaviour, 'the individual is viewed not as a distinct, unique person, to be studied in depth and known by his or her peculiarities, but rather as a point plotted on an actuarial table' (Garland 1997). This type of formulation is typical of neo-liberal regulatory strategies that individualise social context and valorise notions of individual responsibility (Pollack *et al.* 2010).

Carlen and Tombs (2006) refer to women's penal policy that heavily emphasises psychological interventions as 'therapunitive'. They have argued that a focus on women's 'criminal mind' in many approaches to women in prison eclipses the factors that contribute to the criminalisation of women, such as addictions, poverty, inadequate social assistance levels, lack of employment opportunities and little child-care support. Polsky (1991) argues that such approaches are characteristic of 'the therapeutic state', which 'proceeds from the assumption that ... [marginal citizens] cannot govern their own lives. The state seeks to 'normalise' them ... lower-class clients do not seem to require merely a bit of support, like their middle-class counterparts, but instead wholesale personal and family

reconstruction' (cited in Reich 2005: 15). Similar to approaches taken with female offenders, Reich (2005) illustrates how the therapeutic state operates in gendered ways in relation to mothers in the child protection system. She draws out the role that 'mandated empowerment' plays in enforcing 'normalising' notions of motherhood.

6.5 'Treatment' from the standpoint of key informants

Many key informants stated that overall the work of perpetrator support groups such as S.T.O.P and Together Women were beneficial, both to the client and wider society, as they helped to break the 'cycle of violence' within families. Certainly, there was widespread agreement that more perpetrator support groups need to be created, not only in West Yorkshire but throughout the UK:

I do think that there isn't enough, there isn't enough. I think it should become part of everyday, I think it should be in the schools. Boys and girls should be taught [anger management] in schools, and reinforced as they get older. I think that if they were taught it in school nobody would stigmatise it because everybody would be looking at emotions. (John, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

A number of key informant narratives seem to echo the above; that learning to control and talk about anger needs to be done at a young age. It is viewed as essential that individuals learn that violence is wholly inappropriate all the time; however this instruction would run counter to understandings of violence learnt in the community, family and amongst peer groups (see Chapter 6 for discussion). The suggestion was also made that S.T.O.P needs to broaden the services it provides in order to accommodate the multifaceted, complex needs of individuals:

I think there should be more groups, maybe not called anger management, maybe the wording sometimes, in my group, it made it look like the women in my group were incredibly violent, but they weren't often physically violent. So we have to think of new ways of calling, of talking about it. (Sarah, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

Key informants called for female perpetrator groups to distance themselves from the negative, stigmatising label of 'anger management'. Many feared that women would feel resentment at being labelled the 'problem'. Sarah, for instance felt strongly that the term did not fully address or encompass the needs of those who are also victims of violence. Her concern was that a focus simply upon either 'victims' or 'perpetrators' would sidestep the 'reality' of the situation for many women. However, the majority of key informants

interviewed maintained that the services provided by S.T.O.P and Together Women had proven to be very successful:

...Cos I just thought [Together Women] was such an exciting project, and I'd read the Corston Report and thought this sounds brilliant. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity for women in the city to have a resource like us. (Amy, Together Women keyworker)

On the whole key informant narratives (particularly those who were closely associated with Together Women) seemed to echo what had already been written in publications concerning the women's centres (Together Women Project website). Interviewees were very keen to sing the praises of the Together Women project and anger management 'treatment' in general. A number of statistics highlighting the success of the women's centres were reeled off during interviews, for example:

...In two years at the [Together Women] Project, I've probably, roughly assessed about close to sixty to seventy women. And out of that sixty to seventy women, oh about half that I'd supported with various issues have not offended again, and not come back to the Project for any further support. Erm, which I don't know, just comparing it to supporting male offenders is just staggering I think really. Something works, something that we're doing *works* here. Well I think women respond to it much better, to the support a lot better, more so than male offenders. (Andrea, Together Women key worker)

It could be argued that key informants used the interviews as a springboard to advertise and promote female perpetrator 'treatment' in the face of an impending funding crisis.

6.6 Group counselling and peer support

The feelings and attitudes that coloured the experience of group 'treatment' can be characterised by two main phases: the primary phase focused on the anxiety that characterised the respondents before and during the first group sessions, and the secondary phase centred on the unique relationships between group members. Most respondents mentioned feeling very apprehensive before the first meeting:

At first I felt a bit uncomfortable because I didn't know how people would think of me because of my past, because of me being an ex-user and things like that. Thought people would sort of like look at me different. But I've realised since coming here, everybody thinks of everybody the same. (Sally, 26-35, group attendee, criminal record)

Often this was partly related to the difficulty perpetrators found in acknowledging and/or admitting to their own use of violence. One way some group attendees dealt with this anxiety was to separate and distance themselves from other group members, and to speak of others in a derogatory way:

There are people in there, they didn't say very much and there were others in there that said *too* much, but they were just waffling on about the price of fish, they didn't actually have anything constructive to, they might have actually, it's different, we all learn at different levels, and like this is my, this is my problem, I expect everybody to be at my level. (Imogen, 36-45, group attendee, criminal record)

For some the group was a source of fear, due to the threat of criticism from group facilitators and the other group members. Those who overcome these fears experienced the sessions as a safe environment that enabled learning. The anxiety and shame felt by many respondents prior to the first meeting continued throughout the entire session, but for some women, this nervousness abated quickly:

I am so ashamed of my own behaviour that I find it extremely difficult to talk about, even with close friends. Attending [S.T.O.P] provided me with a space where I can talk about what is happening for me and where I can find support. (Group session attendee, quoted from field notes)

In recent years shame has been used as a tool of social control, and has taken on a new and arguably positive meaning with the rise of restorative justice practices in contemporary western criminal justice (Braithwaite 1989). Restorative justice works explicitly on the principle that offenders must be made to feel guilt and remorse for their actions in an effort to build consciousness. In this way, shaming becomes 'a formal tactic of punishment itself' (Pratt 2000: 418 cited in Kohm 2009: 190) rather than an unintentional by-product or outcome.

Twelve group members interviewed described S.T.O.P and Together Women in a very positive light; the women often expressed feeling a sense of belonging among peers in an empathetic and supportive atmosphere. Participants stated how coming to the perpetrator group sessions served as a cathartic experience. The group sessions were described as a non-threatening environment, an indispensable weekly get-together:

Erm, I do say that it's like my little oasis, it really is. I'll walk out of here on a Wednesday after dumping all the crap and I feel as though I'm ready to go on with the next week. (Jane, 26-35, no criminal record)

Therapy was often described by both respondents and key informants as a social event; a hubbub where the women could converse freely and happily, where they possibly did not have to conceal their violent identities:

Basically, this is the only place I come apart from seeing my family, and I really enjoy being around people when I'm here. (Sue, 26-35, criminal record)

[At S.T.O.P] you know there was an air of, I mean what I've come to recognise as sort of more female styles of conversation. The men, they take it in turns a bit more, especially in the group you know, but the women, they chip in, verbally, they encourage the other women, much more (pause) erm, such more sort of *noise* coming from all over the place. (John, S.T.O.P group facilitator, 56-65, no criminal record)

Respondents described feeling an enormous sense of relief when they discovered others who shared similar 'problems' and life stories. In line with previous research (Zust 2006) it would seem that building new friendships with others and creating a sense of community were essential to the therapeutic development of respondents:

They're really friendly. I've got to know quite a few people and you meet new people every week, like today, we've got three new people. And you get to know people and it's really good, to, you get to make friends as well. (Emma, 18-25, criminal record)

The women shared similar background characteristics, were on familiar terms and somewhat knew each other's problems. As a result, the supportive nature of group sessions may have encouraged private, in-depth discussion. For many of the respondents the services provided replaced the care given by family and friends. Many of the participants had broken relationships with friends and family. Often the women had decided to 'break away' from certain 'dangerous' individuals who had a negative influence over the respondent in order to protect themselves and improve their chances of obtaining a 'better life'. Women's narratives were filled with notions of reform and self transformation:

And I think to myself, doesn't matter if I've got no friends, I'm not going down that road again, I'm keeping myself to myself. (Helen, 36-45, Together Women client, criminal record)

Sometimes a lack of trust and broken relationships with intimates meant that it was difficult for the women to gain the support and understanding needed to control aggression. Bela described refraining from 'dumping' her problems on her family for fear of forfeiting relationships (Field Diary, 15/10/2008). In the eyes of many participants the group sessions provided a safe environment to voice frustrations and obtain non-judgemental viewpoints:

Erm, and also, because I've been through such a lot with [facilitator], I sort of feel as if I *really do* trust her judgement. But it's weird because I don't just get it from [facilitator], I could say the same things to my friends and family and all the rest of it, and they would give me the same kind of reaction. But because it's not (pause) I don't know, because it's out of my circle if you know what I mean, and erm, I don't feel as if [facilitator] has any ulterior motives really, you know what I mean? (Jane, 26-35, no criminal record)

Often during group sessions the roles between facilitators and group members were interchangeable, with many of the longstanding clients offering emotional and practical support to newcomers and all other group members. Similar to research into Alcoholics Anonymous group meetings conducted by Humphreys (2000), some women in this study took on a facilitator role and their opinions and advice were highly valued by other clients, particularly as they were seen by many group attendees to have experienced and overcome similar 'problems'. When asked about relationships between group members, Sue proclaimed 'like Jane [longstanding group attendee], she's really good for giving advice, (smiles) erm and you just don't feel alone'. Some longer term members had completed or were in the process of completing group facilitator training courses provided by S.T.O.P. Anne, a former S.T.O.P client found purpose and fulfilment in 'fighting the good fight'; helping others to change their violent behaviour. Anne saw herself as a source of inspiration to others:

You know, and coming [to the S.T.O.P group session] last week and speaking to people who is in the same predicament that I was in all them years ago, to reflect and tell them how my life's been and how well I've done. It were like, I felt (pause) I don't know, I felt proud of myself, sitting and talking around other people now they're expressing their anger, do you know what I mean? And they was all looking at me and it was like I gave respect straight away, they wanted me to come back next week, do you know what I mean? (Anne, former S.T.O.P group attendee)

This seems to be an increasingly popular path for past offenders who desist from crime and drugs (Maruna 2000) and this urge to help others appeared repeatedly in the narratives of group attendees. Indeed, 'the moral heroism of the redemption script allows the ex-offender to 'unabashedly and proudly' announce his or her past, instead of having to run from it' (Irwin 1980: 94 cited in Maruna 2000: 105). By turning their past into a story, the women gain power and reflexivity over their experiences (Krumer-Nevo 2002). The experiences of the 'old self' are reinterpreted and brought more into line with S.T.O.P's

meaning frames (Humphreys 2000). Helping others to change gave some perpetrators meaning in their lives; it allowed for the creation of a more positive, moral conceptualisation of 'the self' that is valued and praised by society (Aresti *et al.* 2010: 179). Maruna (2000) found in his study exploring the life narratives of a large sample of ex-offenders and offenders, that successful desistance requires a shift to a coherent, pro-social identity, supporting the view that a law-abiding identity is an important factor in desistance. This study highlighted the individual's role and personal agency in desistance.

At times facilitators also shared their own stories with the group, and many respondents felt that an environment of mutuality and reciprocity was created. Paradoxically however, 'treatment' was also defined by the women mainly in a learning context, where good facilitators were largely responsible for its success. Most group attendees described S.T.O.P as a place that enabled learning. Many of them used school language to describe the group 'treatment' (for instance, 'course' and 'class'). The exercises provided by both centres (see Appendix C) were reminiscent of school exercises: photocopy handouts were given to all members and facilitators stood in front of a white board in order to 'teach'. Given that many group members had learning difficulties, were unable to read and described a real dislike of school and learning, this seems to be a questionable style of 'treatment'.

Group experiences were not always positive. A male/female co-facilitator model was used during all S.T.O.P sessions observed, and this dynamic sometimes proved difficult. Originally assuming that feelings of unease would be due to the fact that some group attendees had experienced a history of abuse from men, it was surprising to discover that male (and sometimes female) group facilitators described feeling 'scared' and 'wary' of the female perpetrators. John (who worked facilitating women's group sessions at S.T.O.P) stated that '[S.T.O.P clients are] a really rough bunch'. Similar sentiments were expressed by other facilitators, for example:

...so it took [the group members] a while for them to settle down to me, you know. It were quite scary, they were quite hostile [during S.T.O.P group sessions] (Sarah, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

S.T.O.P group attendees were sometimes depicted as intimidating, unreceptive and antagonistic. A tension in the group sessions was described by Jerome as 'sexual', as innuendos and overtly flirtatious behaviour were often a feature inside and outside of group sessions:

..it was quite difficult. We were last in from having a cigarette, erm I think yeah, cos I said 'come on, let's start the group again' we got in and she flat out asked me to fuck her in the lift, which was pretty kind of like, oh my god. But it, what did she say? 'We could just go to the toilet and have a quick fuck?' (Jerome, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

This quote ties in with the fact that some group members seemed to transcend 'traditional' feminine roles.

Not all participants found the group therapy approach beneficial. Sessions were sometimes seen as a source of fear due to the threat of criticism from S.T.O.P facilitators and other group members. Other respondents simply found discussing incredibly sensitive, personal experiences very difficult in a group atmosphere. Afia, who had discontinued S.T.O.P after attending two group sessions maintained:

I think coming to the group and talking about being raped and abused or whatever, it's like, it's *deep* stuff (getting upset). If it's like a one to one session then that's a different thing, but if it's with a group I just think no. (Afia, 36-45, criminal record)

Those who overcome these fears described experiencing the group as a safe environment that enabled learning. However, there were attendees who discontinued group sessions, and two women in particular who consistently refused to take part in group exercises. The women's unwillingness to participate may have stemmed from a fear of judgement from facilitators or other group members, or the fact that group 'school type' exercises might have been seen as too degrading or demeaning to complete. Unfortunately, these group attendees were uninterested in participating in this study, therefore their perspectives and attitudes towards S.T.O.P cannot be explored. Similar to Peyrot (1985: 351) who interviewed attendees of a drug 'treatment' programme, it could be argued that some S.T.O.P clients (who participated only nominally and briefly) seemed to espouse the necessary motivation and commitment; they possibly presented themselves for therapy to satisfy the mandatory requirement of their referral agencies and had little or no commitment to the programme. For those respondents who suffered from mental illness, making the physical effort to attend group sessions often proved difficult:

Sarah: Would you like to come back to STOP?

Afia: I would like to, I would like to come back. But sometimes, like I say, it's hard to get here even, it's *hard* to get myself out of the house. (Afia, 36-45, criminal record)

One S.T.O.P client who did not want to be interviewed had severe mental and learning difficulties. She was incredibly unresponsive and uncommunicative during group sessions. This group attendee would mostly give barely audible one-word evasive answers during the weekly 'check in', communicating that she 'was fine', 'had a good week' and had not used violence. Her manner was incredibly withdrawn and what she 'got out of' S.T.O.P seems questionable. The needs of group attendees were quite varied, in reality the women had ten minutes to 'offload' each week. It was impossible to meet the multifaceted needs of all group members in that time. In fact, one-to-one sessions were offered to all group members; however these came at the cost of ten pounds an hour which the majority of group members could not afford. It is suggested that the factors that surround group therapy can work for and against an individual's attempt to change and produce either therapeutic or anti-therapeutic effects (Bloch and Crouch 1985). One limitation of this study is that the women self-selected to participate and nearly all participants claimed to have a reasonably positive experience of S.T.O.P and Together Women. Ideally it would have been interesting to explore and uncover the attitudes and behaviours of more S.T.O.P and Together Women clients who had discontinued the group sessions.

6.7 'Treatment' as a turning point

Group attendees reported many positive changes as a result of 'treatment'. They described changes not only on the behavioural level but also with respect to new attitudes towards their partners and children as well as a re-evaluation of violence and its outcomes. They claimed to be able to control themselves; to rethink some of their previous attitudes and behaviours:

My *whole* mannerisms changed, don't get me wrong, sometimes I do shout sometimes, everybody does, I'm human, but I've learnt to deal with my strategies, because I've dropped so much baggage after, coming *here* has been like a dustbin, I've dropped everything here and gone. (Anne, 26-35, no criminal record)

For some respondents, these positive changes had a profound impact upon their relationships with intimates. Group attendees claimed that partners and family members

often found it difficult to adjust to a violence-free relationship (Field Diary). The transformation that occurred in 'treatment' was experienced as a total change in the women's identity, self-perception and in their relationships with others. Indeed, there seems to be a division between interviewee's descriptions of themselves before 'treatment' (which they judge negatively and critically), and their thoughts and behaviours after 'treatment' (where they mostly perceive themselves in relatively positive terms).

A crucial feature of the 'treatment' offered is in getting violent women to learn self control: anger management 'tools' and techniques. Nearly all the interviewees purported experiencing 'treatment' as helping them control the anger that led to their violent behaviour. Many respondents perceived the techniques acquired during 'treatment' as the core outcome of the programme. Among these techniques, the 'time-out' was referred to by all the respondents and was considered to be the main tool that helped them control their emotions and behaviours. The women also mentioned learning other techniques, such as identifying the antecedents of possible violent behaviour through the 'anger ladder' (see Appendix C):

Especially that [anger] ladder, cos obviously when I were drunk I didn't realise any of the [anger] signals, but now I do. And I know if I'm going to get angry with anybody, I know how to calm myself back down. So, yeah it's really good. (Emma, 18-25, criminal record)

Paradoxically, some key informants did not agree with interviewees. Some S.T.O.P exercises were sometimes seen as unfit for purpose:

Women can't take 'Time Out' like men if they've got children. So you've got to come up, you've got to be more creative, you've got to come up with more creative things for them to do. They can't sit and write because the children are there, you can't go for a walk to walk it off. (Sam, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

Other relaxation and adrenaline-relieving techniques were also employed by the women, such as listening and dancing to music, walking the dog, partaking in sports and attending the gym.

Respondents who felt that they had 'lost control' when being violent saw themselves as divided; the words 'mad' and 'crazy' were often used as metaphors to describe the increasing estrangement the women felt from themselves and from their uncontrollable, inexplicable and incoherent behaviour (for further discussion see Chapter 6). Respondents claimed that the 'treatment' taught the skills they lacked, and the women saw the success

of 'treatment' as having acquired the ability for self-control. This control appears to be an external 'tool', not an integral part of the 'self'. Due to the acquisition of these new 'tools', group attendees describe themselves as 'calm' and contained. However, some women express doubts about the 'tools' long term ability to prevent violence, given certain circumstances:

But I even think to myself now since I've come to these anger management classes my personality and all has changed. *Don't get me wrong*, I'm not innocent and I can flip off the handle if something really annoys us, but I'm not as bad as I used to be. (Helen, 36-45, criminal record)

It would seem then, that the effects of 'treatment' are often temporary; even if self-control is achieved these women are liable to explode from time to time.

6.8 S.T.O.P Talk

S.T.O.P talk is a term coined by the author to characterise the ways in which interviewees comply with the language and attitudes of S.T.O.P as a means to an end; in a bid to possibly rid themselves of the unwanted interference of the criminal justice system. During interviews, group members used almost identical language; the language of change and buzz words coined by S.T.O.P facilitators. In reality respondents progress depended on their willingness to adopt the language and the rules of the programmes. The S.T.O.P programme and 'Be Safe' booklet represents an explicit attempt to change group attendees' cognition and behaviour.

Throughout observations of group sessions and interviews, it became clear that portraying themselves as basically 'good' people, despite their violent acts, was important to these violent women. It could be argued that S.T.O.P and Together Women clients were 'making good' (Maruna 2000); their narratives were a 'redemption script' that allowed the women to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life. 'The redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator, a victim of society who gets involved with crime to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances' (Maruna 2000: 87). Violence was portrayed as a small part of respondent's complex character and shown to conflict with other aspects of it.

As with Hochstetler *et al.* (2010) and their study that focused on the idea of 'authentic' violent selfhood, respondents crafted the meaning of their own violence to avoid shame, dodge condemnation and buttress the claims of being 'respectable' in both 'criminal' and 'straight' worlds. 'Stigma management is an important component of constructing identity and carrying out deviant behaviours, and offenders efforts to create nuanced distinctions among types of criminal categories should be viewed with this in mind' (Hochstetler *et al.* 2010: 494). Respondent's narratives were used as a means of reducing stigma and avoiding ascription to an identity category that presumably deserves shame and outrage. The women often chose to describe themselves as essentially 'good' to meet socially approved standards of what is 'acceptable' (Hochstetler 2010). In reality, the women's narratives were 'tailored to social conventions and general normative standards' (Mills 1940 cited in Presser 2009: 180).

The veracity and reliability of respondent's narratives should be questioned: accounts given by those who are involved with the social services, probation and criminal justice system may be designed to present positive images for the researcher, and these presentations may differ depending on the social and physical location of the interviews (further analysed in Chapter 4). The fact that offenders faced tangible incentives for portraying themselves in a particular way (remorseful and determined to change) reinforces the view that their stories mainly serve a remedial function (Goffman 1968). Goffman (1959) suggested that there is a constant tension between a persons desire to be true to himself/herself and the need for social approval. Among institutionalised populations, the desire for social approval is perhaps even stronger than it is in other dimensions of social life because people are forced to deal with unflattering images of themselves that are reflected in facilitators and other group members. Their institutionalised selves are dictated through official records and further entrenched because they lack the ability to influence others definitions of the situations.

In spite of this, one participant wanted to make it very clear that she was not attending group sessions to please others and get authority figures 'off her back':

Sarah: Do you think you'll continue on with STOP?

Emma: Oh yeah definitely, I'm not gonna stop coming, *no way*. Cos that would be just defeating the object really, just basically that would be saying that I've come just to get

[the social services] off my back. I haven't, I've come to sort my life out. So yeah, I'll be definitely coming back when the children get taken off [the register]. (Emma, 18-25, criminal record)

It is important to note that due to my very close association with S.T.O.P (see Chapter 4 for further discussion), this respondent may have been using the interview as a springboard to voice her new found 'changed' attitudes and beliefs; to make it known that her commitment to change is sincere. However, due to the fact that this study did not 'follow up' respondents, there is no way of knowing whether this was the case for this particular interviewee. However, in spite of these limitations, the narratives of these women are important as they provide a window into events and circumstances as well as the perpetrators' perspectives; how female perpetrators view themselves, their actions and their communities.

6.9 Respondents as both victims and perpetrators

In general our social institutions (the mass media and criminal justice system in particular) polarises victims and offenders such that individuals are classed as a victim *or* an offender, but not both (Shapland *et al.* 1985). Concern for victims precludes concern for offenders. Garland (2001: 143) notes that this opposition of victims and offenders is especially manifest in the contemporary system. Garland (2001) notes, more than ever, ours is a retributive culture. Henry and Milovanovic (1999) also stress that crime is, first, a matter of defining others as different. Offenders strike us as persons who are unlike us, therefore we do not regret the harm that we cause 'them'. The notion that female perpetrators may be victims and perpetrators at one and the same time, presents a considerable obstacle to the development of coherent policy and practice, particularly in the fields of sentencing and rehabilitation. When the distinction between victim and perpetrator blurs, difficulties arise concerning the attribution of culpability and the distribution of punishment.

Studies suggest that most women who use intimate personal violence have also been victims of aggression from their partners (Swan *et al.* 2008; Caldwell *et al.* 2009 see Chapter 2 for further discussion) and this was true for some respondents in this study. As

with the 'Living without Violence' project² key informants noted that what really marked the women as being different from male perpetrators was that they were also being abused by their current partner:

With the women I didn't recognise that same foundation, I recognised a lot of victimhood in the room, I didn't recognise the same level of insecurity and need to control and erm, sort of need to *prove* themselves, respect and all the sort of masculine traits that I see when I sit with men. All I saw was a lot of women who had been abused, and a lot of reactive behaviour to that abuse. Although we talked about the same sort of stuff, there was a different flavour to it. (John, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions, 56-65, no criminal record)

Paradoxically, the narratives of key informants seem to directly contradict the narratives of some female perpetrators (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). A number of key informants seemed to hold the belief that much female violence stems from victimisation. Female offenders were sometimes portrayed in a sympathetic light. Key informant narratives closely correspond to 'feminist' theories on female violence:

Most of our clients, both women and men are, essentially, to a degree disempowered, or powerless, lacking in personal power or authority. The women clients we get, are partly because of their status, I guess because of the status in society as women, they seem to be *utterly* powerless, *utterly*. (Steve, facilitated S.T.O.P group sessions)

Interestingly, key informants did not discuss the ways in which violence may be enjoyed or used as a form of control and domination by female perpetrators. This may be due to the fact that group attendees mostly avoid such damaging confessions, for reasons mentioned previously in this chapter. Although recognising that women are also violent towards strangers it is important to note that the literature provided by S.T.O.P is not explicitly tailored towards this category of perpetrator. Many interviewees employed violence towards strangers (see Chapter 5 for further discussion) and it would seem that by concentrating mainly on relationship violence and female victimhood, S.T.O.P fails to address a very significant facet of female aggression.

In a study conducted by Henning and Renauer (2005), perpetrators were significantly more likely to attribute their aggression to attributes of the victim rather than their own attributes. The findings of this research seem to coincide with these results. Indeed,

² The Living without Violence project is based in Brighton. It was initially established to provide group support for men who have been abusive to their female partners. The project also focuses on working individually with both male and female perpetrators if group work is not available or suitable.

respondents mostly saw themselves as victims; their partner's violence was viewed as 'more serious':

I never actually, I'm not violent in the fact that, and never have been to any other person apart from him. And, although I don't see my behaviour as good and acceptable, I fully understand it. You know what I mean (laughs), cos I know where I'm pushed. (Jane, 26-35, no criminal record)

While group attendees often acknowledged that their behaviour needed to change, the women also felt that their partners had a 'problem' with violence. Some group members stated that their male partners were also attending IDAP anger management sessions. One respondent, Lilith tearfully stated during a group session that she did not 'belong' in the group, and that it was her husband that needed 'treatment'.

In line with Day *et al.* (2003), often the women's accounts were couched humorously, and laughter was often used when recounting violent episodes. Humour may have been used by respondents as a coping strategy. Sanders (2004) found in her study around sex workers that humour was utilised as an essential tool to distance themselves from clients, the reality of selling sex and the harsh conditions of the sex industry. Similarly, humour may have been used during interviews and group sessions as a 'positive strategy to reduce tension, reinterpret events and re-frame distressing episodes' (Moran and Massam 1997 cited in Sanders 2004: 274). Indeed, Denzin (1987) has suggested that alcoholics use humour to transcend their past and overcome shame by putting themselves in the position of the laughter rather than simply being laughed at. Female aggression was sometimes not problematised:

I remember one particular time we had a women's group, and one of the women hit her husband with a frying pan, which is a classic housewife thing, and they fell about laughing. And me and June were like, 'why was that funny?' We were genuine, 'why do you think that's so funny?' It just is, if that was a man hitting a woman with a frying pan you wouldn't be sat here laughing. They just couldn't, they just thought that was funny. (Sarah, key informant, 36-45, no criminal record)

The mind-set of some respondents would seem to correspond to a closed-ended study of intimate partner violence perpetrated by college women (Fiebert and Gonzalez 1997), which found that women minimise the seriousness of their behaviour as they believe that men can effectively defend and protect themselves.

6.10 Conclusion

By focusing on the affect 'treatment' has upon the lives and behaviours of female perpetrators, this chapter specifically addressed the S.T.O.P programme and the different pathways to 'treatment' some violent women take. The influence anger management counselling and peer support has upon group attendees was explored. Interestingly, this chapter drew attention to the fact that some women involved in this study were both victims and perpetrators of violence. Perpetrators narratives often directly contradicted those of key informants and a sizable amount of literature (see Kernsmith 2005) which typically classifies women as victims. Although some respondents were certainly victimised and suffered extreme forms of violence at the hands of a male partner, a number of women interviewed were very much motivated by power, control and a sheer enjoyment of violence.

Across many sectors, social service organisations have had infrastructure funding eroded and endured cuts and modifications to programmes. The future of S.T.O.P and Together Women has at times seemed very uncertain. In recent years S.T.O.P has had to rely more upon the private sector for its operating costs and has been in competition for increasingly rare government contracts for service provision. S.T.O.P and Together Women were under pressure to adhere to government agendas, evaluation criteria and service delivery methods. As a consequence these women's centres were greatly influenced by the criminal justice system. Obtaining the sample mainly from the S.T.O.P and Together Women centres affected data as some interviewees espoused transformation narratives throughout. Anger management group attendees often claimed that they were 'good now'; that they had learned to control any angry tendencies. A number of respondents presented some uncertainty about their present and future association with violence. The reliability of accounts given by those who are involved with the social, probation and criminal justice services need to be questioned. Findings suggest that much more needs to be known about the context of the lives of female perpetrators before interventions can be made. S.T.O.P did not always do this successfully; the format of group sessions did not allow for this. Interviewee's lives were very complex and unique, the 'one size fits all' approach of handing out photocopies of work and anger management exercises did not prove a success

for all group members, particularly those who were barely literate or had learning difficulties. For those who suffered from mental illness, the group work and confession format of S.T.O.P was often seen as unhelpful. Ethical issues around consent for these often vulnerable, highly traumatised women were also raised.

Due to the lack of participant follow up and the fact that group session attendance was never fixed (most attendees left long before the recommended twelve weeks) there was no way of calculating the success of the 'treatment' provided by S.T.O.P. The women's stories were not confirmed or corroborated by using police records or other accounts. In spite of group attendee's use of S.T.O.P talk, it would seem that the women genuinely benefitted from the catharsis produced from attending group sessions and discussing their lives and experiences. Providing perpetrators with relevant educational information and emotional support in a group setting can prove successful and provide a therapeutic, non-judgemental atmosphere where perpetrators can discuss their attitudes and behaviours. Respondents claimed that the opportunity to view themselves in relation to others played an integral part in the 'treatment'.

Chapter 7: 'Unleashing the force': the experience of violence from a female perspective

7.1 Introduction.

As the issue of female violence is such an under researched topic (as discussed in Chapter 2), the findings of this study not only add an original contribution to the current literature, they sometimes contradict long-standing theories which surround gender identities and violence as a whole. Contrary to the literature on violence which has tended to neglect the voices of female perpetrators, this small-scale study highlights the ways in which violent women experience their own use of violence. It examines the ways in which female perpetrators are understood; not only in terms of how perpetrators understand their own violent behaviour, but how others who work with violent women comprehend and problematise such behaviour. This study also explores how and when female violence is manifested, and the forms which it takes. To conclude this thesis, this chapter examines the key themes that were dominant in this study: women's violent identities, some women's enjoyment of violence and the impact 'treatment' has upon the lives and behaviours of violent women.

7.2 How female perpetrators are understood: the nature and manifestation of violence

The respondents of this study displayed a range of aggressive behaviours. When incensed, some women employed verbally abusive language to confront and deride others. It was also common for interviewees to damage the property of adversaries in order to make a statement. When using physical violence, women bit, rugby tackled, head-butted, threw objects and wielded weapons. They used pepper sprays, Stanley Knives, screwdrivers, high heeled shoes, snooker balls in socks and kitchen knives. Interestingly, one interviewee used sexual violence in order to dominate and wreak revenge on a male partner (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). However, women's narratives seemed to focus on more obvious forms of aggression; respondents in the main talked about physical acts of

violence, such as ‘hitting’, ‘kicking’, ‘punching’ or ‘fighting’. ‘Proper fights’ were sometimes understood as being different from stereotypically female forms of fighting, for instance ‘scratching’ and ‘hair pulling’. Some respondents were eager to dissociate themselves from indirect, ‘girly’ methods of fighting. This discovery is inconsistent with the suggestion that female aggression is often displayed in ‘displaced, attenuated or disguised forms’ (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974: 234) due to its ‘gender inappropriateness’. Violent incidents took place in public and within the veiled confines of the private sphere. While some respondents would have no qualms in expressing violence publicly, others would be filled with embarrassment and shame if their use of threatening behaviour and physical violence was witnessed by others. It is interesting that interviewees were often not as concerned regarding the reactions of others when non-physical forms of aggression were employed in public. It could be that verbal and/or indirect violence is more hidden, less shocking and possibly seen as more ‘gender appropriate’ when compared to overt physical violence. Indeed, findings suggest that some respondents felt that keeping within the confines of ‘gender appropriate’ behaviour was all-important, particularly during motherhood and with older age:

Yeah [my mum] was she was quite [violent] (pause) and I didn’t think much of it when I was younger, but *now* I think she was *actually* thirty odd at the time. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

The idea that there is a ‘gender appropriate’ form of violence is echoed throughout the literature (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). Although a number of participants in this study classify violent behaviour as either appropriate or inappropriate given certain circumstances, some interviewees paid no attention to the full consequences of their actions. For instance, Eve felt ‘pushed to the limit’ by her previous partner; murder was the main focus of her thoughts:

I’d never thought about going to prison, I just wanted this guy out of my life. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

7.3 The focus of female violence

Violence was directed not only towards partners: acquaintances, friends, family members and strangers of both sexes were targeted. Research suggests that women are more likely

to damage property and/or employ verbal and physical violence when opponents are female (Burbank 1987). However, when targets are male, it has been argued that female aggression takes the form of threatening behaviour, nonverbal insults and the non-performance of tasks or expected behaviours (Burbank 1987). However it is notable that respondents in this study used far more overt forms of violence; women damaged property and used weapons in a greater proportion of violent incidents involving men than in incidents involving other women (as discussed in Chapter 3). This could be due to the fact that younger men are typically physically stronger than women. In reality, some respondents would assess the situation first before using violence; women would sometimes employ violence 'because they could', when they were sure that their opponent would not retaliate. For example, Jess found that she could be violent towards bouncers, but felt completely subjugated and powerless when faced with violence perpetrated by her previous partner:

...I did hit [my previous partner] back at the very beginning and then I soon learned that he would hit me back harder. And I'd had fights with men prior to that, bouncers in clubs, I'd had fights with bouncers, getting thrown out, but because they had a certain amount of self restraint they couldn't, but with [my previous partner] I was terrified really, he would beat me up just for no reason. I could be sat and he'd come in, probably rattling or something, erm and he'd just beat me up. And he'd do really horrible, quite torturous things towards the end [of the relationship], and I'd just curl up into a ball. (Jess, 26-35, non group attendee, no criminal record)

There were certain categories of people with whom some respondents rarely fought. A number of women refused to direct injurious, detrimental aggression against friends and relatives. For example, Zoe described having 'a bit of an argument' with family members, but this was classed as separate and less serious compared to the violence used on other opponents. It would appear that this ability to abstain from using violence towards certain adversaries suggests that women's aggression takes a 'controlled' form; that tacit rules are connected to violence. For a number of interviewees, friends replaced family and provided much needed care, support and security. For those with failed support systems, friends were relied upon for protection in a 'gangster world' (as discussed in Chapter 4). While these groups were often held in high accord, some respondents admitted to venting their frustrations on friends and family members:

I've always had fights you know. One of my cousins, we were brought up as sisters and we were both as bad as each other. I mean I've had stuff from my cousins, but that's family fighting, you know we do it a lot. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

Kim's narrative suggests that this close family relationship thrives upon violence, which often escalates until serious damage is caused or the police are involved. Violence here is described as a fairly 'normal' routine, which produces much respect and admiration:

...but [my cousin] is *crazy*. Honest, you won't meet a woman *like her*. Like her boyfriend beats her and I think that's why she's *so*, she's like, you can't hurt her. Like when I was beating her I could *feel*, you know every time I hit her, I could feel the swelling coming, and still she was saying to me 'carry on, carry on, carry on' and I was like 'you're crazy, you're *absolutely* crazy' you know, and she's mad. (Kim, 18-25, non group attendee, no criminal record)

7.4 Respondents as 'victims'

The main thrust of the S.T.O.P and Together Women programmes is that violence is never justified. In spite of this, some interviewees felt that their use of violence was sometimes warranted and reasonable. Group members often maintained a 'victimised' self-image; they 'talked the talk' of victimisation and often did not conceptualise themselves as 'violent' per se (see Chapter 6 for further discussion). For some women their violent behaviour occurred as a result of suffering violence at the hands of a male partner (as discussed in Chapter 7). This is in line with other research (Stuart *et al.* 2006; Swan and Snow 2002; Swan and Snow 2003) which demonstrates that self-defence is consistently cited as a motive for violence by women. A number of narratives seemed to correspond with feminist arguments (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Campbell 1986) as some interviewees described using force to defend themselves and their children against abuse. Jane depicts her husband as dominant, controlling, violent and cruel; she portrays herself as a 'victim'. Often respondent's partners were described as having a 'problem' with violence, and it was common for partners to be attending anger management courses at the same time (Field Diary 17.09.2008). A number of respondents considered their male opponents to be bigger, stronger and more capable of causing considerable injury than they were, and this was used by some as a way of justifying and minimising the serious nature of their own use of violence.

7.5. Women's violent identities and the 'normalisation' of violence

Violence appears to be implicit in some respondent's identities: the importance of violent reputations, weapon use and gang membership were evident in interviewee's narratives. The 'tactics' of violence and the way violent reputations were employed were very similar to the ways in which males stereotypically use violence. Although violent reputations were sometimes viewed in a negative light (as discussed in Chapter 6), being seen as 'hard' provided a number of respondents with respect, protection and high status amongst peers, family members and the community. However, overt violent behaviour was related for most respondents with young age, immaturity and irresponsibility. 'Growing up' was associated with having a family, drinking less and behaving 'sensibly', perhaps even setting an example to others. For some participants (particularly anger management group attendees) violence was seen as outside the confines of parenthood; they sought to be 'good mothers' and to conform to gendered stereotypes.

Often interviewees had witnessed violence when growing up, from both mother and father; their families and friends used violence and violence for them was a 'normal' way of life. For one participant in particular, it was only when she had committed a very grave act of violence that she realised the seriousness of her behaviour:

Sarah: Why did you see yourself as a violent woman?

Sue: Cos I were always out of control, cos I'd been violent before, most of my arrests have been for violence. Er (pause) but it were just the shock of you know, actually cutting somebody's throat made me realise that I were out of control. (Sue, 26-35, S.T.O.P group attendee, criminal record)

Most participants had been involved with the criminal justice system; fourteen women had been arrested, the vast majority for violent offences. Often, it was this encounter with the criminal justice system which led respondents to attend both S.T.O.P and Together Women centres. The negative associations with the term 'violence' may have prevented interviewees from retelling particular experiences. In line with other studies that investigate women's use of aggression (Burman 2004), certain violence, for instance between siblings and family members was often seen as 'normal' and within the tacit rules that surrounds violent behaviour.

7.6 Violent reputations and self-presentation

The majority of respondents had violent reputations and/or came from families with a violent tradition:

It's hard you know, cos I'm from an Irish background I've got the Irish temperament, you know. If there was trouble or whatever, my mother used to learn us that we had to fight, and if you didn't fight, you'd get beaten up at home. It would be one or the other. (Afia, 36-45, former S.T.O.P group attendee, criminal record)

It has been argued that it is chiefly males who engage in violence in order to generate and maintain a certain reputation; 'in most social milieus, a man's reputation depends in part upon the maintenance of a credible threat of violence' (Daly and Wilson 1988: 128 cited in Polk 1994: 185). Clearly, this was not the case for this sample of female perpetrators. Reputation for some participants was all important; it served to ensure that these women would no longer be 'walked all over' or seen as 'soft' or a 'doormat'.

Some respondents took great pride in their physical strength, two interviewees explained how 'working out' and keeping fit afforded great power, self-confidence and self-respect. As we saw when Zoe said:

I'm not weak. I've got a lot of body strength even though I'm quite small. I can take down a fully grown man quite easily, erm but I mean I used to play rugby, I used to play hockey, I used to play American football. I was never like (pause) soft, I was never (pause) I was always quite tough. (Zoe, 18-25, non group attendee, criminal record)

Despite hankering after a 'hard' image, many participants in this study had a strong and pervasive desire to make a positive impression on others. Paradoxically, Kim craved to strike a balance between being 'respected' and being liked. Indeed, not all women enjoyed using violence and the sometimes negative connotations a violent reputation afforded. In spite of considerable involvement in fighting, a number of respondents tended to hold negative attitudes towards their own use of violence. In general, they saw themselves as 'nice', 'lovely' and 'good' people. Kim mentions that despite her very violent, 'wild' behaviour, she feels that she is still a person with 'good morals'; stating that she was 'brought up well' by her parents and that she would never steal. Here it seems that Kim's idea of morality is completely different to that of the criminal justice system. Some

respondents however did not agree with or condone 'senseless' fighting and fighting for the 'fun of it' (see discussion in Chapter 4):

Sarah: So do you see yourself as a violent woman?

Eve: I am with [my ex partner], nobody else. I am the kindest, nicest person going. But *him, he* used to goad me, he could make a parson swear. I used to be really, er really quiet. (56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

Respondents described experiencing dissociative episodes when being violent; a number of women spoke incredulously of 'out of character' behaviour. Interviewees at times described their conduct as being 'crazy', frenzied, 'out of control' and evil. Indeed, when angered Afia explained 'I feel like I'm walking with the devil'. This idea that female violence is perceived as immoral and wicked ties in with media representations of female offenders (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). It is interesting to note that for these women, a myriad of strongly felt emotions were associated with violence; distress, regret, guilt, pride, power and pleasure were often felt at one and the same time. Women's narratives were often laced with sadness; however interviewees also spoke with great vigour and enthusiasm about their own use of violence. One respondent in particular used humour when discussing the sexual assault of her previous partner (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

7.7 Gang membership: safety in numbers

Although only three respondents described being affiliated in some way with a gang, a section on female gang membership was included in this thesis as the literature surrounding this issue is relatively sparse (as discussed in Chapter 2). Deschenes and Esbensen (1999) found that both males and females describe joining gangs above all else for protection. This was very much true of the participants in this research. For Jess, being known in her neighbourhood and surrounding areas as being affiliated with a gang and being 'someone not to mess with' provided much needed safety and a sense of security. Campbell (1984) argued that for male gang members violence provides power, whereas females are violent because they fear victimisation. Although this was partly true for the respondents in this study, gang membership not only provided Kim with safety, it offered a sense of authority, power and influence.

Carrying a weapon was often justified by respondents as a rational decision; a necessity when the odds were stacked against them. Interviewees described social situations where weapons such as knives and guns were commonly carried. For these women fear of a damaged reputation and serious injury increased the need for self protection. Both Jess and Afia, who found themselves in risky situations, resorted to befriending individuals who carried guns in order to stay protected. Jess carried and/or used a knife to safeguard herself from adversaries who also carried weapons. Indeed, as with other studies (Bailey *et al.* 1997; Williams *et al.* 2002) it would seem that a strong predictor for weapon carrying is the belief that others are carrying weapons. As a consequence, being armed with some sort of weapon was seen as standard and a must. For Afia, developing a reputation for 'crazy', unrestrained behaviour served to make a strong statement to others. Carrying weapons reinforced the women's reputation as dangerous, vicious and menacing. Indeed, the 'display of a weapon during an altercation creates a definite power shift towards the carrier' (Brennan and Moore 2009: 219). Weapon use was both premeditated (where objects, designed or adapted to cause harm were brought to the scene of the incident by the perpetrator) and impulsive (where respondents made use of objects in their immediate environment, for example kitchen knives and screwdrivers):

Oh I'd punch him, kick him (pause) hit him over the head with a chair, *anything* (pause) anything that were in my reach. I've hit him with telephones, kicked him off his arse, punched him and punched him, tried to drag his jugular vein out, tried to kick him down. (Eve, 56-65, Together Women client, criminal record)

7.8 Women's enjoyment of violence

Women's narratives indicate that being violent sometimes created a sense of satisfaction, enjoyment and empowerment, particularly when violence resulted in a seemingly positive outcome. A sense of power was produced when violence was effectively used to restore justice, respect and a violent reputation. A number of respondents described being drawn further into violence by the addictive qualities of aggression. Indeed, Jude maintained, 'you kind of get an adrenaline rush when you're angry and it's like a release'. One of the most interesting findings has been that some women experience a heightened sense of excitement and passion, they relish and savour perpetrating violence. Interestingly however, non group attendees were more likely to admit that their use of violence was

calculated, rational, deliberate, pre-planned and intended (as discussed in Chapter 4). Afia who had only attended two group sessions stated:

... 'cos if anyone bad comes up to me and [my ex partner] wants to do whatever, or threaten me or whatever, I'll get it out. And I've got this thing about *main veins*, if I'm gonna do it then I'll get you. (Afia, 36-45, former S.T.O.P group attendee, criminal record)

Non group members were also more likely to state that their use of violence was deserved by the victim. When interviewing group attendees and non attendees it became apparent that the images these two groups of women presented of their lives were very different. Often group attendees voiced uncertainty about their present and future involvement with violence. Some group members claimed that they had learned to control any angry tendencies. However, for both sets of respondents, violence was often viewed as being necessary; violence was utilised when there were no other alternatives. Mirroring Jack's (1999) findings, some women employed violent tactics as a last resort, when no other means of affecting others appeared to work.

7.9 The impact of 'treatment' upon female perpetrators

Although S.T.O.P attendance was voluntary, many group members were attending as a result of pressure from social services and probation. As a result, group member's language was highly influenced by both S.T.O.P and Together Women. Group attendee's narratives were peppered with 'S.T.O.P Talk' (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). It is interesting that these women's centres (greatly influenced by the criminal justice system and funding-related targets) hold very different ideas and beliefs regarding violence to the interviewees themselves. These women had entered into a therapeutic world where they were told to behave in a non-violent way; a way that was often very different from familiar, learned behaviour.

This research echoes the argument that the criminal justice response to domestic violence can be viewed as a set of relatively uncoordinated and unconnected support systems (Stanko *et al.* 2002). Although Together Women had the facilities to bring together the support systems (such as housing, debt management and counselling) to help female offenders or those at risk of offending (see Chapter 2), the same systems did not seem to be

in place at S.T.O.P. There was little communication between one group attendee's mental health worker and the S.T.O.P Project; little background given regarding the client's needs and violent history (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). This group attendee was 'dumped' in the hands of S.T.O.P without any sharing of ideas and regular feedback to other support services. It could be argued that this group participant was forced to attend the sessions in order to 'tick boxes'.

Many respondents were negatively disposed towards the police and other figures in the criminal justice system; they had no respect for those in authority and despised being judged by others and being 'told what to do' (as discussed in Chapter 6). This view is highlighted in Imogen's claim that 'the police think they know, they're the law, they're above it, so they should know'. Many respondents held negative views because of their experiences with the criminal justice system, which they interpreted mainly in terms of the unfairness with which they had been treated:

And next thing I'm at [police station] putting a blame on me for something I haven't done, the thing that I got fines for, [for theft] they're trying to blame this one on me again. But like I said, once I hit [Together Women] I thought, 'time's time, keep my nose clean, show social services and that I can do it'. (Helen, 36-45, Together Women client, criminal record)

In accordance with Carr *et al.* (2007), the findings of this study suggest that although some participants had negative encounters with police, criminal justice system and/or other figures of authority, they were often forced to rely upon and work with these powerful organisations in order to fulfil their aspirations and 'sort out' their lives. Some respondents did hold optimism for the future: consistent with other research (Campbell 1984) Kim had a strong desire to climb the social ladder in order to better her lifestyle.

7.10 Conclusion

This research draws attention to the fact that women can be both perpetrators and victims of violence. Findings often stand in agreement with the 'feminist' viewpoint, that women are often only violent when acting in self-defence (typically against a male partner). However, it is clear that some respondents utilised power and control towards both male and female opponents when using violence. Narratives of identity changed with time and

place: participants saw themselves as both 'victims' and/or 'perpetrators' depending on the context. Respondents described performing different 'selves' in public and private. For the participants of this study, overt aggressive behaviour varied depending on the audience and circumstance surrounding the violence. In reality, respondent's narratives were highly complex; their stories were often contradictory and paradoxical. Indeed, 'how *one* creates a positive impression may vary depending on the audience one is trying to impress' (Tice *et al.* 1995: 1120 original emphasis).

When interviewing respondents, it became very clear that some women took pleasure in controlling and dominating both their male and female opponents. Violence was directed not only at partners: acquaintances, family members and strangers of both sexes were also targeted. Often interviewees committed acts of violence which are typically associated with, and very similar to men's violence (see Canaan 1996). Indeed, this research illustrates that violence is not exclusively the reserve of men; the participants of this study conducted serious physical, psychological and sexual violence. This is not consistent with Burbank's (1987) findings that in most cases women appear to inflict relatively minor physical injuries. This study highlights the fact that the current literature (as discussed in Chapter 2) mistakenly pigeonholes female perpetrators as helpless victims; in reality the narratives of violent women are unique and complex. This research suggests that there is a need to move away from solely understanding women's violence in terms of gendered forms of victimisation and '(re)consider the role of female moral agency in violent encounters' (Burman 2004: 97). As Afia put it:

Give me respect and I'll give it to you back. Knock on my door with an attitude, come at me like a big man and I will batter you like a big man. (Afia, 36-45, former group attendee, criminal record).

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Appendix A: Perpetrator consent forms and documentation sheets

Interviewee Consent Form

The purpose of this consent form is to tell you of your rights as a participant in this study, and of the procedures involved in the collection and keeping of data about yourself.

- It is your right not to answer any question that you are asked.
- You are free to end your participation in the interview at any time without giving a reason and without any consequences.
- Your participation or non-participation will not affect the support and advice you receive at S.T.O.P.
- Your name and identity will be removed from all notes, transcriptions and publications so no one will be able to recognise you in the study. You are guaranteed confidentiality in any discussions and publications in agreement with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- A tape recorder will be used to record the interview; however this does not have to be used if you feel too uncomfortable. If used, the tapes and all notes will be kept in a secure place. Under no circumstances will tapes or transcripts be released to any other person.
- You have the right to access the data about yourself and to ask for it to be returned to you at any time.

In signing this form you agree to the following:

I have read this consent form in full. I have had a chance to ask questions concerning any area that I did not understand. I consent to being a participant in this study.

Signature of participant:

Printed name of participant:

Date of interview:

Signature of interviewer:

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You are welcome to ring me at any time with questions you may have regarding this research. My number is 07515 725 920.

If you want to confirm that I am a research student at the University of Leeds, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, please contact Debbie Westmoreland on 0113 343 4408.

Thank you for your time.

Sarah Williams

Postgraduate Researcher

School of Sociology and Social Policy

University of Leeds

Documentation Sheet

Name:

Date of the Interview:

How old are you?

18 to 25 years

26 to 35 years

36 to 45 years

46 to 55 years

56 to 65 years

66 to 75 years

76 to 85 years

Over 85

To which of the following racial or ethnic groups do you belong?

White British

White Irish

White – Other White Background (please specify)

Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

Mixed – White and Black African

Mixed – White and Asian

Mixed – Any Other Mixed Background (please specify)

Asian or Asian British – Indian

Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

Asian or Asian British – Other Asian Background (please

- specify)
- Black or Black British – Caribbean
- Black or Black British – Africa
- Black or Black British – Other Black Background (please specific)
- Chinese
- Other Ethnic Group (please specify)

Are you:

- Gay
- Straight
- Bisexual
- Rather not say

Do you consider yourself disabled?

- Yes
- No
- Rather not say

What is your employment status?

- Employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired
- Other (please specify)

Do you receive benefits?

- Yes (please specify)
- No

If employed, do you work?

- Full time
- Part time

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or equivalent

College

Degree or postgraduate qualification

Other (please specify)

Have you been arrested by the police? If yes, please give reasons for arrest:

Yes

No

What is your current marital status?

Do you have a criminal record

Single

Yes

Married

No

Separated

Divorced

Living with partner

Widowed

Other (please specify)

How long have you been in this relationship?

Under a year

1-3 years

4-10 years

11-20 years

21-30 years

31-40 years

41-50 years

51 years or more

What is the age of your partner?

Under 18

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

66-75

76-85

Over 85

Which of the following ethnic or racial groups does your partner belong?

White British

White Irish

White – Other White Background (please specify)

Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

Mixed – White and Black African

Mixed – White and Asian

Mixed – Any Other Mixed Background (please specify)

Asian or Asian British – Indian

Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

Asian or Asian British – Other Asian Background (please specify)

Black or Black British – Caribbean

Black or Black British – Africa

Black or Black British – Other Black Background (please specify)

Chinese

Other Ethnic Group (please specify)

Is your partner disabled?

Yes

No

Employment status of your partner

Employed

Unemployed

Student

Retired

Other (please specify)

Does your partner receive benefits?

Yes (please specify)

No

If employed, does your partner work?

Full time

Part time

How many people currently live in your household?

1

2

3

4

5

6 or more

Do you have children (including step and foster children)?

Yes

No

If yes, how many children do you have (including step children)?

		Gender	Age
1	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Which of the following ethnic or racial groups do your children belong to?

White British	<input type="checkbox"/>
White Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
White – Other White Background (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – Any Other Mixed Background (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British – Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or Asian British – Other Asian Background (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black or Black British – Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black or Black British – Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black or Black British – Other Black Background (please specific)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Chinese

Other Ethnic Group (please specify)

How many of the children live in the same house as you?

1

2

3

4

5

6 or more

How many children live with someone else?

1

2

3

4

5

6 or more

Who do they live with?

Live on their own

Family member (please specify)

Family friend

Foster care

Adopted

Other (please specify)

Non group attendee Information Sheet

What is the research about?

- It is my aim to conduct research into the lives of women who have been violent and are seeking help to change.
- I hope to conduct one-to-one interviews which will last an hour each.
- The interview will be completely informal, taken at your pace.
- You are encouraged to talk about the aspects of your life that you consider relevant – rather than focus entirely on traumatic instances of abuse or violence.

Themes I want to explore:

- In order to get a better understanding of who you are, during the interview I will ask you to draw a rudimentary timeline of your life. This timeline can then be used as a starting point for discussion, and referred to throughout the interview.
- I am interested in your violent behaviour, attitudes towards and experiences of violence.
- How has your anger/violence affected your life and relationship with others?
- What strategies do you use to overcome violence?

What will the research be used for?

- The information gained from the interviews will go towards my dissertation. I may even have the opportunity to publish my research findings in academic journals.
- I plan to write a report that will be published and sent to domestic violence charities/support services.
- While this study may not benefit you personally, other self-help groups and perpetrators of domestic violence may be helped

Confidentiality

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- This research is not about identity, judgement or blame.
- You are guaranteed complete confidentiality – your name and identity will be removed from all notes, discussions and publications.
- A tape recorder will be used to record the interview; however this does not have to be used if you feel too uncomfortable. If used, all tapes will only be heard by me, the tapes and all notes will be kept in a secure place. Under no instance will tapes or transcripts be released to any other person.
- The information given will not be misused against you.

Appendix B: Key informant consent form and information sheets

Interviewee Consent Form

The purpose of this consent form is to tell you of your rights as a participant in this study, and of the procedures involved in the collection and keeping of data about yourself.

- It is your right not to answer any question that you are asked
- You are free to end your participation in the interview at any time without giving a reason and without any consequences
- A tape recorder will be used to record the interview; however this does not have to be used if you feel too uncomfortable. If used, all tapes will only be heard by me, the tapes and all notes will be kept in a secure place. Under no circumstances will tapes or transcripts be released to any other person
- Your name and identity will be removed from the tape and notes so no one will be able to recognise you in the study. You are guaranteed confidentiality in any discussions and publications in agreement with the Data Protection Act 1998
- You have the right to access the data about yourself and to ask for it to be returned to you at any time. You will also have the chance to re-listen and respond to tapes and transcriptions to see if you are happy with the information I am using

In signing this form you agree to the following:

I have read this consent form in full. I have had a chance to ask questions concerning any area that I did not understand. I consent to being a participant in this study

Signature of participant:

Printed name of participant:

Date of interview:

Signature of interviewer:

You are welcome to ring me (Sarah Williams) at any time with questions you may have regarding this research. My number is 07515 725 920.

[150]

If you want to confirm that I am a research student at the University of Leeds, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, please contact Debbie Westmoreland on 0113 343 4408.

Thank you for your time

Sarah Williams

Postgraduate Researcher

School of Sociology and Social Policy

University of Leeds

Documentation Sheet

Name:

Date of the Interview:

How old are you?

18 to 25 years

26 to 35 years

36 to 45 years

46 to 55 years

56 to 65 years

66 to 75 years

76 to 85 years

Over 85

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Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

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Mixed – White and Asian

Mixed – Any Other Mixed Background (please specify)

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Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

Asian or Asian British – Other Asian Background (please specify)

Black or Black British – Caribbean

Black or Black British – Africa

Black or Black British – Other Black Background (please specific)

Chinese

Other Ethnic Group (please specify)

Are you:

Gay

Straight

Bisexual

Rather not say

What is your current marital status?

Single

Married

Separated

Divorced

Living with partner

Widowed

Other (please specify)

Do you consider yourself disabled?

Yes

No

Rather not say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school or equivalent

College

Degree or postgraduate qualification

Other (please specify)

Have you been arrested by the police? If yes, please give reasons for arrest:

Yes

No

Do you have a criminal record

Yes

No

Appendix C: S.T.O.P and Together Women worksheets

Anger Ladder

Ladder

Signals



The Costs of Violence:

There are enormous consequences to the victims of violence. Apart from physical hurt and suffering, there is always the risk of permanent physical damage. In particular there is a real danger of permanent damage to somebody's well being. With violence, it is usually the case that there is damage to property, which frequently makes a poor financial situation worse.

Violence is Learned Behaviour:

People learn to behave violently because violence always gets them what they want in the short term. We quickly make habits of behaviour which provides quick rewards. People also learn a set of skills from their parents and others, through which they attempt to deal with everyday happenings and problems.

If they learn poorly, or acquire self-destructive or ineffective habits, perhaps from their parents, then their dealings with others will be less happy than they could be. For example: many women learn that violent behaviour is effective and even acceptable through watching the violence of their parents. But since violence works against the relationships in the end, these habits seem to become ingrained in people and are very difficult to change, change is really possible. Hence the programme sets out to teach you a new set of skills, to be added to those you already have.

Success in combating your own violence depends upon TRYING OUT THESE NEW SKILLS to see if they make life better for you and your partner. Commit yourself to the discipline of attempting each of the ways of managing conflict which is offered to you in this handbook and getting it to work in your situation. Only when you are convinced that a technique is of no use to you should you give up on it.

Violence is Due to a Decision of the Person to Attack:

Anger is a natural emotion but we make a CHOICE whether to deal with it constructively or destructively. Alcohol is frequently put forward as an excuse for violent behaviour. It can certainly lower your inhibitions but it cannot cause violence. Only the CHOICE you make can allow this to occur. It is also not true that people make you violent, it is your reaction to what they do or say which sets in motion the build up of violence. At the end of the build up you make a CHOICE, whether to attack or walk away. It is important to recognise this in order that in the future you can make a decision not to attack, however strongly you are provoked. So although using alcohol or illegal substances to excess will not create violence, it will certainly impair your ability to combat it.

The Individual has Personal Responsibility:

No matter what has happened to you in the past, no matter how badly others treated you, the responsibility for your own actions in the present is yours alone. You cannot use their behaviour as an excuse for what is unacceptable in yourself. Hence this programme regards as of the utmost importance that you attend to the issue of safety. You must make a personal contract with yourself to make yourself as safe as possible with everyone around you. You should resolve to take all the necessary precautions and to do all in your power to learn ways of managing anger and avoiding violence.

What are the Characteristics of the Violent Person?

The violent person frequently uses tricks of denial and minimalising to avoid the reality of what they have done during their acts of violence. They will use statements such as are found in Section D of the self assessment test to deny their responsibility. A person will also claim that; 'I forget what happened', 'it happened in a blur', 'I was not aware of what I was doing', they were not really hurt' and many more besides. These are all expressions which are used to protect a person from the reality of the violent and inexcusable things which they have done. In effect, to protect their self- image, they refuse to acknowledge them as their behaviour.

Another characteristic of the violent individual is that of blaming the other person entirely for the incident. The person has offended against one of their beliefs, therefore the person has to be corrected and be made to see the error of their ways. This pattern emerges from a strong belief system.

A violent person also assume that their way of doing things is normal; 'that's what happened in my home, so it must be right!'. A person's explosion will lead to the battering stage, either verbal or physical, which is usually followed by an immediate flood of feelings of remorse. But in the battering, the perpetrator has reduced their victim to a state of complete nothingness and compliance.

Physical Abuse	Consequences
Grabbing, punching, biting, throwing objects	Injury, death, internal injury
Punching, slapping, pulling hair	Hospitalisation
Stamping, shooting	Loss of limbs, mutilation
Kicking, smothering, glassing, stabbing	Health problems, scaring, lying, Anxiety, miscarriage
Running down, rape, branding, mutilation	Social services
Burning, drowning	Effects on children
Electrocution, shaking, gassing, tearing clothes	Imprisonment
Sexual abuse	Trust destroyed, disablement
Strangling, body language, smashing objects	Brain damage, infertility
	Post traumatic stress disorder
	Kills sex drive
	Destroys relationships

Forced substance abuse Forced abortion Restraining forcefully, kidnapping Killing	
--	--

Verbal Abuse	Consequences
Shouting Swearing Name calling Threatening Deformation of character Insulting family and friends Baiting Intimidating Laughing Blaming Silent treatment Screaming Interrogating Dehumanisation Accusations Lying	Fear, insecurity Loss of trust Weight loss Hospitalisation Affects job Affects friendships No confidence Anxiety, suicide Alcoholism Drug addiction Dishonesty Belief that you are stupid Destroys family life Nightmares Affects children and schooling Children copying parents

Financial Abuse	Consequences
Withholding funds Gambling Facing eviction Utilities terminated Stealing from people Preventing employment Fraud Not sharing People dependent on you	Homelessness Loss of social life Stress, prostitution Replace smashed objects Poverty Having to sell possessions Starvation Prison, begging, lying Physical and mental health problems

Psychological/Emotional Abuse	Consequences
Emotional blackmail Mind games Sulking, name calling Glaring, pointing Lying, tantrums Death threats Threats, guilt Selfishness Degrading, kidnapping	Nervous breakdown Guilt, no self worth Make you feel crazy Isolation Cut yourself off from friends Suicide, ashamed Become withdrawn Loss of self respect Loss of trust

Demoralisation Frightening Refusing medication Crying and pleading Begging, promising Erratic behaviour	Sectioned Paranoid Lack of confidence Damage to children
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Time Outs- Coping Strategy:

What are the advantages of time outs?

What problems do you think you will have?

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How will you solve these problems?

My Time Out Strategy!

When I feel I am getting angry or am in an argument I will take a time out.

How will I explain I need to get out of the situation? Think about scripts etc

Where will I go for my time out once I leave the situation? (Somewhere safe.. don't dwell on it but distract yourself)

How will I approach that person after my time out? (what if they get angry, what if you get angry?)

Time to Relax!!!!

Relaxation techniques can actually influence our physical responses to conflict. To try one of these out, think of something that has made you very angry. Remember the details of the conflict, how you felt, and how your body responded. Try to make yourself feel just as you did during the conflict.

- ❖ Become aware of your breathing. Listen to it.

- ❖ Begin to tense the muscles in your body. First tense your arms. Squeeze your fists together and make the muscles tight. Hold for ten seconds.

- ❖ Now relax the muscles. Feel them relax. Feel the tension leave your body. Take a deep breath.

- ❖ Continue to tense and relax all the muscles in your body: shoulders, legs, feet neck and face.

- ❖ Breathe, and let each breath bring a sense of calm and relaxation to your body. Allow the tension to flow out of your body, and the calmness replace it.

It is important to know what provokes your anger and causes us to get in to conflict. The next time you become angry, take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds, and try to work out what is making you upset. Use the relaxation technique whenever your feelings begin to overwhelm you.

Appendix D: The direction of violence

Direction of violence

Name	Violent towards
Afia (former group attendee)	Police, son, ex-partner, strangers (male and female), acquaintances (male), father
Anne (former group attendee)	Bullies at school, friends, acquaintances (male and female), strangers (male and female), self, daughter, mother
Bela (group attendee)	Bullies at school, male acquaintance (in youth), best friend, mother, siblings (in youth and adulthood), own children
Emily (former group attendee)	Mother, friends
Emma (group attendee)	Ex-partner (at time of relationship), mother, father
Eve (Together Women client)	Ex-partner (at time of relationship)
Hannah (S.T.O.P victim support group attendee)	Partner
Helen (Together Women client)	Bullies at school, sister, brother, father, social services, 'everyone who offered help'

Imogen (group attendee)	Bully at school (male), acquaintances (male and female), strangers (male and female), police
Jane (group attendee)	Ex-partner (at time of relationship), sister (in youth), self
Jess (non group attendee)	Siblings (in youth), bouncers, ex-partners (at time of relationship), strangers (male and female), acquaintances (male and female), self
Jo (Together Women client)	Teachers (in youth), sister (in youth and adulthood), partner, self, mother, strangers
Jude (non group attendee)	Friends (in youth), brother (in youth), ex-partner (at time of relationship), mother, mother's partners, current partner, police
Kim (non group attendee)	Friends (in youth and adulthood), teachers (in youth), acquaintances (male and female), cousin, ex-partner, strangers (male and female), police
Lilith (group attendee)	Partner, own children
Sally (group attendee)	Bullies at school, male stranger (in youth), ex-partner (at

Sue (group attendee)	time of relationship), shop security guard, partner Ex-partner (at time of relationship), strangers (male and female), current partner, brother, father, mother, self
Zoe (non group attendee)	Friends (in youth and adulthood), strangers (male and female), acquaintances (male and female), ex-partner, brother (in youth), sister (in youth)

Violent towards	Percentage of the sample
Police	22
Offspring	22
Strangers	44
Ex-partners	22

Partners ³	56
Acquaintances	39
Friends	28
Mother	39
Father	22
Siblings	44
Bullies at school	28
Social Services	6
Self	28
Cousins	6
Teachers	11
Bouncers	6

³ This category refers to violence perpetrated towards a partner at the time of the relationship (includes current and previous partners)

Security guard	6
----------------	---

Appendix E: Poster promoting participation

A STUDY INTO FEMALE VIOLENCE:

Researching the lives of women who are or have been violent

Are you a woman who struggles to control your temper?

Have you been verbally and/or physically abusive?

Would you like to take part in this research?

A £10 voucher of your choice will be given as a thank you for taking part

What the research involves:

- ⚙ An hour long interview; this does not have to be face-to-face, it can be over the phone or via the internet
- ⚙ The interview will be informal, taken at your pace
- ⚙ I am interested in your violent behaviour, attitudes towards and experiences of violence
- ⚙ How has your anger/violence affected your life and relationships with others?
- ⚙ You can talk about what you consider to be relevant – rather than focus entirely on traumatic instances of abuse or violence

This research is not about judgement or blame - you are guaranteed complete confidentiality. The information you give will not be misused against you

If you are over 18 and interested in taking part in this research, you are welcome to contact me with any questions you may have

Appendix F: Interview schedules

Key informant Interview Schedule

Could you tell me a little about your organisation; its background, aims and objectives?

In which ways are female perpetrators currently treated by your organisation?

Do they differ from male perpetrators?

Has the treatment of female perpetrators changed over the years?

How do you target your clients? How do you recruit new members?

What are the demographic characteristics of the female perpetrators that come here? Is there diversity amongst the clients? Why is this the case?

Can you tell me about the organisations you work with? Have the outcomes of co-working been negative or positive? Could you give me some examples?

How long have you been involved in this organisation?

What work do you do?

What were the reasons why you came to work here?

What concerns did you have when you first started working with violent women?

Have these changed?

Does your work with violent women involve any particular difficulties that you had not expected?

Have you worked with violent men in the past? How does working with violent women differ?

How has your work changed, if at all in recent years?

Can you give me any examples of difficult cases that you have worked with?

Any examples that you feel were a particular success?

What are the characteristics of female violence? How is their violence displayed?

Who are females violent towards?

How does female perpetrated violence differ from male perpetrated violence?

What do you think are the triggers for female violence?

How does violence impact upon the lives and relationships of female perpetrators?

We all lash out at times; people lose their tempers in all situations. Where do you think the line should be drawn? Do you think there's a difference between lashing out or losing your temper and being a perpetrator of violence?

I read in newspapers that more and more women are imitating masculine behaviour, binge drinking, fighting in the streets etc...do you think it is the case that women today are more violent?

How do you understand women's use of violence?

Do you empathise with female perpetrators and their use of violence?

Do you think women always need treatment?

What impact(s) do you think your organisation has had upon the lives and relationships of violent women? Why?

How do you think your organisation is continuing to stigmatise women by labelling them violent women?

How do you think the current 'treatment' of female perpetrators could be improved? Why? In which way?

Perpetrator Interview schedule

Participant asked to produce a timeline during the interview

So how long have you been coming to STOP? Why did you start? Who were you referred by?
(Participant asked to make a note on timeline)

[177]

Can you explain how coming to the group makes you feel? Did you feel forced to come here? Has coming to this group been helpful/unhelpful? Why?

Do you see yourself as a 'violent' woman?

How do you see the other women who attend? Do you see the other attendees as violent women?

Have you told anyone that you come to this group? Can you explain why you decided to do this?

What do you classify as violent behaviour? Physical, psychological and/or financial violence?

Thinking about your life as a whole, when were you first violent? What happened? How did this make you feel? *(Participant asked to make a note on timeline)*

What triggers your violence? Arguments with partner/children, money troubles, alcohol/drug use, stress at work, boredom, jealousy? Can you give examples? *(Participant asked to note any events in life that triggered violence)*

Have the aspects that trigger your violent behaviour changed over your lifetime?

What leads up to your use of violence? What are your 'anger signs'?

[178]

In which way(s) have you been violent? Do you cry? Throw things? Use objects? Shout? Do you scream? Play mind games? Withhold money? Please explain.

Who do you direct your anger to? Family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and/or strangers?

We all lose our tempers, get angry in certain situations, when do you think the line is crossed? Do you think there's a difference between lashing out or losing your temper and being a perpetrator of violence?

When did your use of violence first become a problem? What happened?

Has your attitude towards your use of violence changed throughout your lifetime? Please explain.

What strategies do you employ to overcome your use of violence? Do you use the exercises suggested by STOP? Do you take time out?

Do you find the STOP exercises helpful? Which ones? Why?

Has coming to STOP affected your relationships with others around you? If so, in which way? Please give examples.

Do you receive or have you received any other counselling apart from STOP?

[179]

What support services do you/have you used? Have you had dealings with the police, social services, probation service and/or prison? What happened? How were you treated?

Have these been helpful and/or unhelpful experiences? Why? Please give examples

In what way does your use of violence make you feel? Does violence make you feel powerful? Does it make you feel in control? Do you get what you want? Do you enjoy it? Does it give you a rush?

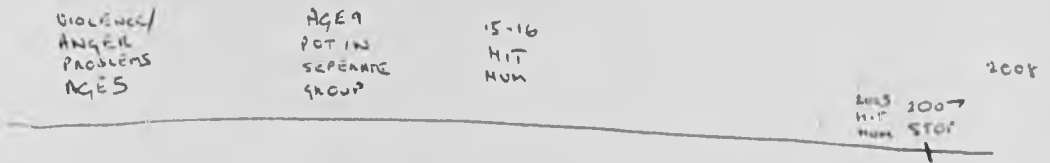
Does it make you feel humiliated? Desperate? Shamed? Not in control?

How have family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and partners reacted to your use of violence? Can you give me some examples?

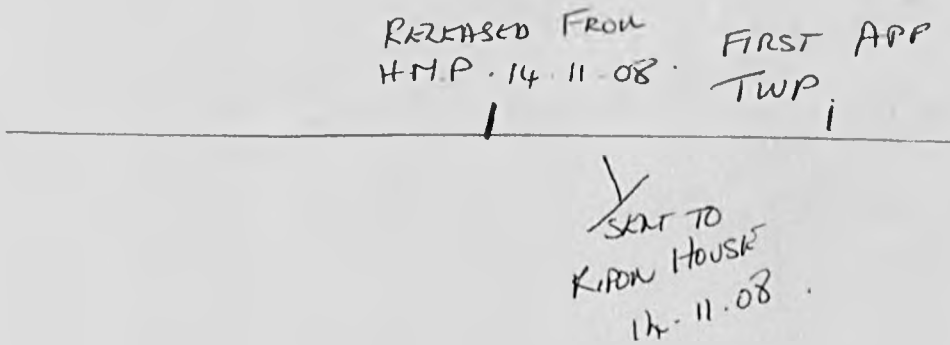
Have reactions to your violence changed over your lifetime?

Appendix G: Perpetrator timelines

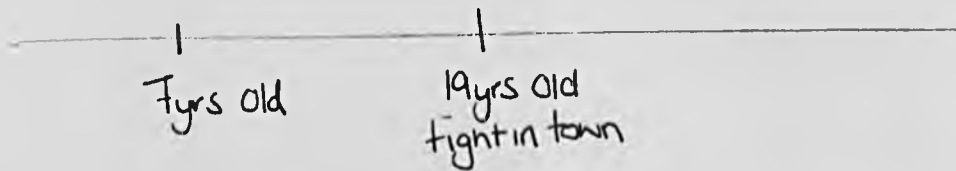
Jo Timeline



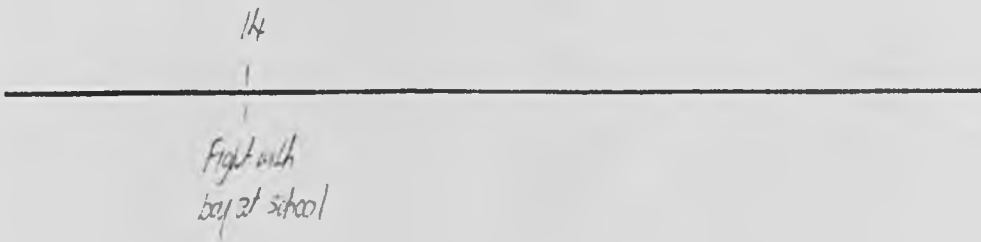
Eve Timeline



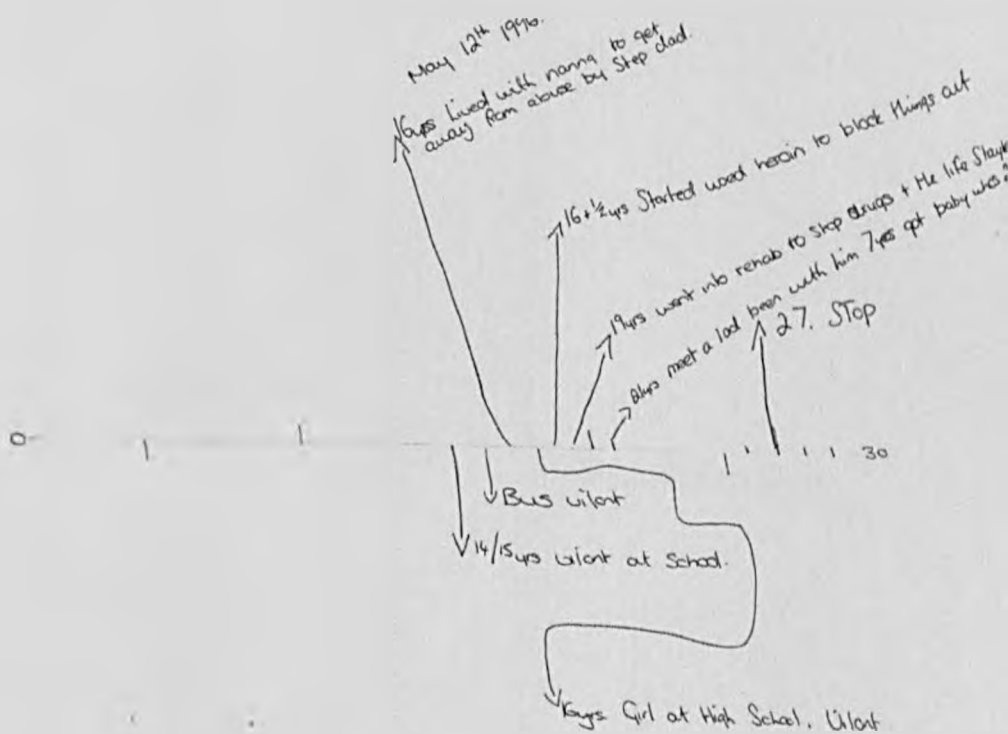
Jen Timeline



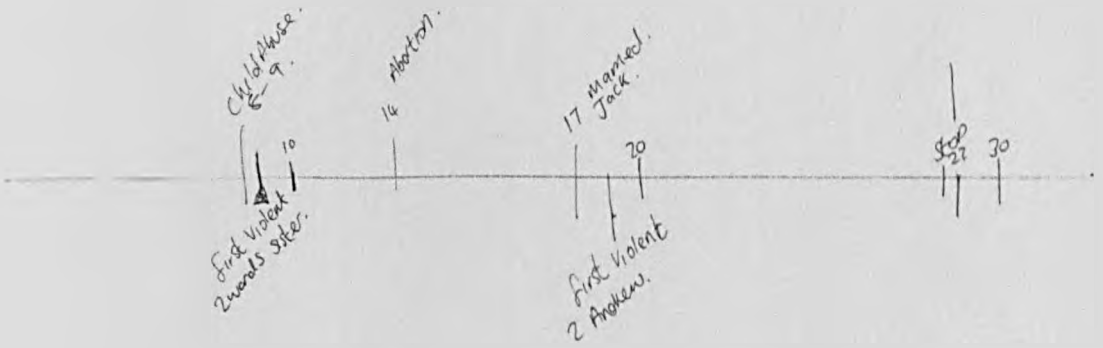
Lucy Timeline



Anne Timeline



Jane Timeline



Sue Timeline

Dad beat us badly, I went into care for weeks
first major fight age 14-15

MICK
1998-2006

Mark
2005

AUG 07
first came to STOP

Emma Timeline

18 years Traded man + OAD
house

24 years tried to stab ex partner

25 years Stop DRINKING
25 years old started coming to STOP