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TAKING THE BLAME?

**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING IN THE
CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

by

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DECLARATION

In accordance with the requirements of Warwick University, the following declarations are made:

I hereby declare that the ideas, development and writing up of this thesis were the responsibility of myself, the candidate, working within the School of Health and Social Studies at the University of Warwick under the supervision of Professor Audrey Mullender and Dr Christine Harrison.

Some of the material arising from the research has previously been accepted for publication in the form of a chapter in an edited book. The reference for this chapter is:

Lapierre, S and Bain, K (accepted) 'Parental responsibility and partnership: Citizenship and gender in UK children and Families social work'. In Oleksy, Peto and Waaldijk (eds) *Gender and Citizenship in a Multicultural Context*. Bern: Peter Lang.

This work was published after the period of study began and before the thesis was completed.

This thesis and the research on which it is based are the sole work of the author.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution.

ABSTRACT

This pro-feminist study aimed at developing an understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence in contemporary Britain. Despite more than three decades of feminist activism and scholarship in the field of domestic violence and a broad and detailed understanding of women's experiences of abuse by their intimate partners, little has been written on mothering in this context, particularly from women's experiences. Moreover, a critical evaluation of the literature in the field of domestic violence revealed a tendency to draw upon a deficit model of mothering and to blame abused women in regard to their mothering.

This study was located within a research agenda that builds on women's experiences and efforts in order to overcome mother-blaming. It was based upon a qualitative and participative methodology, and five group interviews and 20 individual interviews were carried out with a total of 26 women. It focused on women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence as well as during and after the separation process, and located these experiences within a comprehensive understanding of the institution of motherhood. The findings from this study extend the understanding of the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence, which are due to the interaction between the particular context created by the violence and the ideologies and structures that underpin the institution of motherhood. Furthermore, the findings challenge a deficit model of mothering in the context of domestic violence, and demonstrate that women who have experienced domestic violence typically strive to be 'good' mothers and develop a range of strategies in their attempts to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering.

The findings from this study also demonstrated that women are able to identify positive support, but their experiences more often tend to emphasise the failure of such support to materialise. These findings have major implications in terms of supporting women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

You want to hit back, but you know you don't stand anywhere; you want to speak out, but you know you're a loser before you even start; you want to protect your children, but you've got nowhere to turn to; you want to run away, but there is nowhere to run to. It never ends, it never ends. But no one seems to realise how difficult it is. (Fiona – research participant)

Trying to make sense of one's own feelings, motivations, desires, ambitions, actions, and reactions without taking into account the forces which maintain the subordination of women to men is like trying to explain why a marble stops rolling without taking friction into account. (Frye 1983, p. xi-xii)

As a result of more than three decades of feminist activism and scholarship in the field of domestic violence, the literature provides a broad and detailed understanding of women's experiences of abuse by their intimate partners and of the contribution of domestic violence to male domination and women's subordination (Pizzey 1974; Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Kelly 1988; Hanmer and Itzin 2000). More recently, there has been a growing interest in the situation of children living with domestic violence (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995a; Holden *et al.* 1998a; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001) and concerns regarding women's mothering or 'parenting' have generally been raised alongside concerns regarding the situation of children. Nonetheless, limited attention has been paid to women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence (for notable exceptions, see Krane and Davies 2002; Radford and Hester 2006).

The empirical study that is reported in this doctoral thesis was an attempt to explore and make sense of the feelings, motivations, desires, emotions and actions of women who – like Fiona – have experienced mothering in the context of domestic

violence in contemporary Britain. From the outset of this project, there was a clear sense that this research could only be achieved through a strong commitment to feminism. The reasons that informed this commitment are discussed in detail throughout this chapter and throughout the thesis, but overall it seemed that a feminist perspective had much to offer in terms of exploring the experiences of women and taking into account the forces that maintain their subordination (see Frye 1983), as well as in terms of developing an epistemologically, methodologically and ethically sound research design.

This introductory chapter sets the scene for the thesis and is divided into four sections. The first section presents the background and the aim of the study. The second section discusses the theoretical approach that underpinned this research project and suggests that the work of radical feminists has much to offer to the study of mothering and domestic violence. The following section addresses some of the particular implications related to my position as a man researching women's experiences of mothering and domestic violence. Finally, the last section exposes the rationale and the overall structure of the thesis.

BACKGROUND AND AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This thesis focuses on mothering in the context of domestic violence and it is clear that the research project that is reported here did not arise from my personal experiences, as it is often the case in feminist research (Stanley and Wise 1993; Kelly *et al.* 1994). In fact, my position as a male researcher in this project contrasted with the fact that mothering and domestic violence primarily affect women, that all the participants in this study were women and that most research on women's experiences of either mothering or domestic violence has been

conducted by female scholars – male scholars in these fields have tended to be less concerned with the experiences of women and have often adopted a 'gender-blind' perspective (for a notable exception, see Websdale 1998, 2001).

In fact, the focus for this study arose out of a process that started before the beginning of this project. Between 2001 and 2003, I was involved in a research programme that looked at the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect in Quebec, Canada. At that point, my interests lay primarily with the experiences of children living with both domestic violence and child abuse and neglect (Lapierre 2003). While I was involved in this project, I became increasingly critical of the dominant conceptualisation of child neglect (see Swift 1995; Scourfield 2000; Turney 2000; Scourfield 2003) and of its use in the context of domestic violence – mainly because it carries important implications for women (see Magen 1999). These concerns were exemplified by the work of colleagues who were involved in the research programme, which failed to take into account the experiences of women and tended to blame women:

Certaines formes de négligence peuvent-elle être violentes? Ne pas protéger un enfant d'une agression, est-ce de la violence ou seulement de la négligence (Mayer 1998)? C'est un peu se demander si les pays dits développés qui ne portent pas assistance à des pays en proie à des guerres civiles sont des acteurs, des agents de cette violence ou s'ils sont seulement coupables de négligence? (Chamberland *et al.* 2003, p. 29)

[Can some forms of neglect be considered as violence? Not to protect a child against an assault; is it violence or simply neglect (Mayer 1998)? It is a bit like asking if the so-called developed countries that do not provide assistance to countries experiencing civil war are actors and agents in relation to this violence or if they are only neglectful]

In 2003, I decided to undertake doctoral studies in order to investigate further the connection between child neglect and domestic violence by drawing upon and attempting to centralise the experiences of women who have experienced domestic

violence. The decision to conduct this project in Britain was mainly motivated by the well-established feminist-critical tradition in the field of domestic violence (Hester *et al.* 1996; Mullender 1996; Hanmer and Itzin 2000; Mullender 2002) and in social work more generally (Wise 1990; Langan and Day 1992; Dominelli 2002).

A thorough examination of the feminist and pro-feminist literature on child neglect confirmed the problematic nature of the concept of child neglect and highlighted its significant implications for women (Swift 1995, 1998; Scourfield 2000; Turney 2000; Scourfield 2003). Overall, this work demonstrated that the notion of child neglect implicates women in their 'role' as mothers. In her work on 'the feminizing of neglect', Turney (2000) argues that 'mother-blaming is certainly not new in child care and child protection social work, and the focus on neglect ... may seem to be particularly susceptible to this construction' (p. 47). Consequently, the focus of the study was broadened in order to include an investigation of women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence and to consider the connections between these experiences and the issue of child neglect.

From the early stages of the empirical part of this research, all the women who were involved in the project confirmed the importance of considering their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. In contrast, these women had relatively little to say on the issue of child neglect *per se* and this concept appeared to be more meaningful in the realm of policies and practices than for the women themselves. As this research was concerned to focus on issues that were significant for the women who were involved in the project, the concept of child neglect progressively became less central, to be considered as only one aspect of women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

The general aim of the study that is reported here was therefore to develop an understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence. As mentioned above, the study drew upon the experiences of women in terms of their mothering in the context of domestic violence and was concerned with the forces that maintained their subordination (see Frye 1983). More specifically, the research questions were as follows:

- What are the experiences of women in regard to their mothering in the context of domestic violence?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do these experiences of mothering reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood?
- How do women define positive support in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence?
- To what extent do women report the presence of positive support in their experiences, either from their informal social networks or from voluntary and statutory services?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood?

Overall, these research questions are congruent with the theoretical approach that underpinned this project. This theoretical approach is presented below.

IN THE STEPS OF SECOND-WAVE RADICAL FEMINISM

A debate needs to be opened up in feminism as to what is to be understood by the term 'theory'. The current emphasis on theorising about theory, with its philosophical and epistemological ramifications, means that there is an ever-widening gap between theory and empirical investigation. (Maynard 1995, p. 276)

Without experience, theory becomes an esoteric mystery, a game for academic troglodytes. (Thompson 2001, p. 49)

As mentioned previously, I started this research project with a strong commitment to feminism. My initial interest in feminist theories arose during my social work training. Indeed, there are several points of convergence between feminism and social work, particularly the critical, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory approaches in social work (Humphries and Truman 1994; Pringle 1995; Mullender 2002), and authors have argued more specifically for the development of feminist social work theories and practices (Wise 1990; Dominelli 2002; White 2006).

However, it is through my involvement in research in the field of domestic violence, with feminist scholars and in feminist research environments (mainly the Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes and the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being), that my commitment to feminism was strengthened.

In this section of the chapter, I argue that it is necessary to retain a commitment to some of the tenets of second-wave feminism in order to produce useful research that can inform social change – which is greatly needed in relation to mothering and domestic violence – and that the legacies of radical feminism have much to offer. The intent here is not to engage in a general discussion about theory or to ‘theorise about theory’ (Maynard 1995, p. 276), but to highlight the enduring qualities of this theoretical approach and its potential for the empirical investigation of mothering in the context of domestic violence. I use the term ‘legacies’ in relation to radical feminism in order to emphasise the idea that this perspective should not be considered in terms of narrow stereotypes but as a complex and evolving theoretical position (Kelly *et al.* 1994; Maynard 1995). This approach influenced all aspects of this research project and, while its foundations are discussed here, its specific implications are addressed throughout the thesis.

The decision to privilege this specific theoretical approach was the outcome of a complex and dynamic process, which required an intellectual engagement with a range of feminist theories. Indeed, important developments have taken place within feminist theories over the last three decades, some of which have challenged the most fundamental tenets of second-wave feminism (for instance, see Evans 1995; Tanesini 1999; Fawcett and Featherstone 2000; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Following Mary Maynard (1995), I suggest that it is possible to take into account some of the most helpful insights that have been proposed in the recent theoretical developments, while at the same time retaining a commitment to the earlier tenets of second-wave feminism that have been challenged (see also Mullender 2003). In this regard, feminist scholars need to 'temper the tendency completely to decentre the self and present it as utterly fragmented' (Maynard 1995, p. 273) and to reassert the significance of the category 'woman':

While analyses of diversity have sensitised us to the fact that 'woman' is not a unitary category, this means neither that the concept is meaningless nor that it cannot be a unifying term ... The emphasis here is on locating possible common experiences around which a sense of commonality and community might be developed. (Maynard 1995, p. 275)

In addition, feminist scholars need to counteract the tendency to focus on culture, language and representation at the expense of materiality and to establish a distinction between universalisations and generalisations:

It is important, as we are now often told, to assert the impossibility of constructing theories dealing with totalities and which are universally applicable. But this is not the same as denying that it is possible to make general theoretical statements. These address, albeit in qualified terms, general properties and, through comparison, highlight similarities and differences, where these clearly arise from substantive material. (Maynard 1995, p. 274)

This last point echoes the idea of pattern recognition/construction proposed by Marilyn Frye (1990). Indeed, Frye (1990) argues that discovering, recognising and creating patterns in the individual and collective experiences of women make it possible to sketch a schema within which certain meanings can be sustained.

These issues are significant in terms of the epistemological aspects of this research, which are discussed in Chapter Four.

Although there are important difficulties involved in the process of establishing distinct categories within second-wave feminism (see Maynard 1995), at a theoretical and conceptual level it is a radical feminist perspective that appears to present the greatest relevance for this research project. In terms of exploring the experiences of women, radical feminism has been seen as a 'woman-centred' approach, i.e. it has stressed the validity and centrality of women's experiences and rejected 'a scale of values that makes man the measure and judge of women's worth' (Bryson 1999, p. 25). This was an important contribution made in the early stages of the second wave of feminism by women who often started from their personal experiences in order to make visible issues that had previously been ignored in 'malestream' research, including women's sexuality, pregnancy, mothering, pornography and violence against women (Millett 1969; Firestone 1970; Dworkin 1974; Brownmiller 1975; Rich 1976).

For radical feminism, the main concern lies in the oppression of women. Indeed, Rowland and Klein (1996) state that 'radical feminism has concentrated on creating its theory in the writing of women's lives and the political analysis of women's oppression' (p. 9). Again, this was an important contribution made in the early stages of the second wave of feminism, when so many issues started to be seen

through the lens of women's oppression. A good illustration of this point can be found in the work of Adrienne Rich (1976), which proposes a conceptual distinction between women's experiences of mothering and the patriarchal institution of motherhood:

In this book I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that the potential – and all women – shall remain under male control ... For most of what we know as the 'mainstream' of recorded history, motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities. (Rich 1976, p. 13, italics in the original)

In her interesting work on oppression, Marilyn Frye (1983) stresses that 'to recognize a person as oppressed, one has to see that individual as belonging to a group of a certain sort' (p. 8, italics in the original) and, therefore, to adopt a macroscopic rather than a microscopic view. According to Frye (1983),

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systemically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. (p. 4)

Therefore, radical feminism has drawn upon women's individual and collective experiences in order to discover and expose 'patterns' of oppression (Frye 1990). This has been achieved by different means, including consciousness-raising groups and feminist research. However, radical feminists have not been concerned with developing a mere understanding of women's oppression, but have been committed to struggle to end this oppression. This was an important theme in the work of radical feminists in the early stages of the second wave of feminism (for instance, see Millett 1969; Dworkin 1974; Brownmiller 1975; Rich 1976; Firestone 1970) and remains an important theme today (Mikhailovich 1996; Rowland and

Klein 1996; Thompson 2001). Radical feminists have called for a range of strategies and have stressed the importance of developing strategies that come from women's experiences (Rowland and Klein 1996). Those have included the development of consciousness-raising groups and of collective political actions, and the production of 'radical feminist knowledge' has in itself represented an act of resistance (Rowland and Klein 1996).

In her recent work on radical feminism, Denise Thompson (2001) stresses that, if feminism is committed to ending the oppression of women, the focus needs to be placed on the roots of this oppression, i.e. male domination. She is unequivocal in regard to the idea that the main concern for feminism should be male domination – not women, sexism, gender or patriarchy – and that it should be named as such. Nonetheless, she states that the concept of patriarchy 'does have an honourable feminist history, and with a little feminist caution it can still provide good service' (Thompson 2001, p. 63). Indeed, the concept of patriarchy has been largely used since the early accounts of radical feminists in order to designate the system of male domination that oppresses women (Millett 1969; Dworkin 1974; Rich 1976). In the same vein, Bryson (1999) assesses the usefulness of the concept of patriarchy and concludes that it remains an indispensable descriptive and analytical tool for feminist theories. Moreover, the use of the concept of patriarchy can in itself be seen as a form of feminist political action, because this term provides 'a permanent reminder that "gender oppression" and "sexism" are not "empty" or gender-neutral categories and that men rather than women are the dominant gender group' (Bryson 1999, p. 318). Both 'patriarchy' and 'male domination' are used throughout the thesis.

Rowland and Klein (1996) argue that the concept of patriarchy encompasses a set of structures that maintain male domination as well as a set of ideologies that maintain the structures themselves. Similarly, Thompson (2001) argues that

Relations of ruling can operate without the consent of the ruled, through the use of violence, force and coercion, through the monopolization of wealth and information, through the confining of goods and opportunities to small, elite segments of the population, through policies and practices which benefit some at the expense of others. (p. 22)

She also addresses the ideological dimensions of male domination:

The social conditions of male supremacy function most efficiently to the extent that women (and men) accept the reality of their position, embrace it as natural and unalterable, desire its continuation and fear its destruction, and believe it is their own meaningful existence. (p. 22)

A significant difficulty in documenting these structures and ideologies is the fact that 'manifestations of male domination, although they are sometimes horrifically violent and degrading, are also subtle, mundane, ordinary, unremarkable' (Thompson 2001, p. 8). These difficulties have been documented in relation to both mothering (Glenn 1994; Chase and Rogers 2001) and domestic violence (Kelly 1988; Kelly and Radford 1996; Mullender 1996).

A number of critical issues need to be addressed here, particularly in the light of the critique of radical feminism. First, the concept of patriarchy should not be considered as a totalising or universal concept; rather, it is a theoretical statement that refers to the recognition of male domination within a given historical and cultural context. However, the relevance of the concepts of women's oppression, male domination and patriarchy, cannot be simply discussed at a theoretical level; empirical data that support the existence of enduring patterns of male domination in

relation to mothering and domestic violence are highlighted in the review of the literature presented in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three.

It is also crucial to understand that, because the concept of patriarchy refers to a set of structures and ideologies that maintain male domination and women's oppression, it does not imply that the man is in a dominant position and the woman in a subordinated one in every individual relationship (Thompson 2001). This last point raises the question of diversity and differences between women and between men. In this regard, Kelly and her colleagues (Kelly *et al.* 1994) argue that the level of concern with these issues has not been the same for all scholars as it has for many activists:

Many of the commentaries published in the 1980s interpret the first decade of 'second wave' feminism as an idealistic universalizing of women's experiences. Whilst much of the more academic work published in the 1970s (and into the 1980s) can be read in this way, activist literature and history tells a somewhat different story; a story in which differences between women were sometimes recognized and where conflicts and struggles about race, class and sexuality were commonplace within feminist groups, campaigns and organizations ... Our goal now is to develop an anti-oppressive feminist praxis, which aims to both account for, and take account of, the complex interplay of multiple sources of oppression (and areas of privilege) in women's lives. (Kelly *et al.* 1994, p. 28)

Therefore, radical feminists continue to assert the importance of the category 'woman', but the concern with diversity has long permeated the work of radical feminist scholars (Stanley and Wise 1990; Kelly *et al.* 1994; Crow 2000). It is clear that there are multiple differences between women – for instance, in terms of age, ethnicity, sexuality, class, dis/ability – and that 'woman is not the only concept or social category any of us live under ... no one encounters the world simply as a *woman*' (Frye 1990, p. 176-177, italics in the original).

Moreover, whilst radical feminists have given primacy to women's oppression through male domination over other forms of oppression (Rowland and Klein 1996), it has been increasingly recognised that many women or groups of women are located at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. According to Radford and her colleagues (Radford *et al.* 1996),

Recognizing differences between women does not preclude the possibility of feminist analysis ... Central to feminism is the task of understanding how within patriarchal societies women's oppression is experienced by women who may be simultaneously privileged and/or oppressed by the power structures of race, class, sexuality, age and/or dis/ability while being oppressed by gender. (p. 9)

Furthermore, whilst radical feminism has been primarily concerned with the 'sort of power which causes problems' (Thompson 2001, p. 10), Thompson (2001) also argues that 'a liberatory politics like feminism is a stance against power in the form of domination and in favour of power in the form of the exercising of capacities at no one's expense' (p. 10). This is important, as an adequate conceptualisation of power should provide a useful concept of agency. Indeed, failing to recognise women's individual agency, even in the most marginalised and excluded life circumstances, would mean representing women as 'helpless victims' (Mullender 2003, p. 192).

In this section, I have argued that it is necessary to retain a commitment to some of the tenets of second-wave feminism in order to produce useful research and that the legacies of radical feminism have much to offer for the empirical investigation of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The following section addresses some of the implications related to my position as a male researcher.

BEING A PRO-FEMINIST MALE RESEARCHER

The relationship of men to feminism(s) is a difficult one: it is fundamentally about power, and is fundamentally problematic. (Hearn 1992, p. 161)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, my position as a male researcher contrasted with the fact that mothering and domestic violence primarily affected women and that all the participants in this study were women. Feminist scholars have generally been sensitive to differences between research participants and researchers and have tried to minimise the power differential that such differences create (Renzetti 1997; Skinner *et al.* 2005). Hence, due to the centrality of women's oppression and male domination in the theoretical approach presented above, my position as a man researching women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence was an important issue to address.

From the beginning of this project, I had to consider myself as a member of the oppressor social group. As was mentioned above, the concept of patriarchy refers to a set of structures and ideologies and does not imply that the man is in a dominant position and the woman in subordinate one in every individual relationship (Thompson 2001), but it is clear that 'without "ordinary" men's participation in routine oppressive practices, men's subordination of women would not take the form that it does' (Pease 2002, p. 2). While I cannot locate myself outside patriarchy, I have positioned myself clearly and explicitly against all forms of male domination, including men's violence. In his study of men's violence, Jeff Hearn (1996a) argues that looking critically at male domination and men's violence is challenging for all men:

To put this rather bluntly, to focus on men, and particularly on men's violence to women, unsettles and makes problematic the way men are, not just in the

doing of these particular actions of violence, but also more generally. It raises question marks against men's behaviour in general. For example, how is it possible that men can be violent to women, perhaps over many years, and this can be part of a socially accepted way of being a man? (Hearn 1996a, p. 99)

Although all aspects of this research project were underpinned by a feminist approach, a 'problematic issue for the relationship of men to feminism is the definitional one – for if feminism is theory and practice by women for women, then men cannot be feminists, even though men can learn from, agree with, respond to, be changed by feminism' (Hearn 1992, p. 162). To me, it is clear that the pursuit of a feminist label should not be an aim in itself. As argued by Toril Moi (1989, cited in Bryson 1999),

If feminism is primarily the struggle against oppressive and exploitative patriarchal power structures, the important thing for men is not to spend their time worrying about definitions and essences ('am I really a feminist?'), but to take up a recognizable anti-patriarchal position. (p. 212)

Therefore, I have tended to use the terms 'pro-feminist' man and 'pro-feminist' researcher to make my theoretical position explicit. In the same vein as Websdale (1998), by 'pro-feminist men' I refer to

Those men who are sympathetic to the broad aims of feminist perspectives and recognize the systemic and historically enduring oppression of women, but who have not felt the weight of that oppression firsthand. (Websdale 1998, p. 221)

In this project, I deliberately chose not to engage in a theoretical discussion about issues of masculinities. Given that the focus of this study was clearly on women's experiences, a discussion about masculinities would appear to be irrelevant and could even be misleading. Indeed, Hearn (1996b) argues that the focus on masculinities has diverted critical attention away from the materiality of what men

do and from a materialist or materially based analysis of gendered power relations and, consequently, he advocates for an emphasis to be placed on men's practices rather than on masculinities. The concept of men's practices seems to hold more potential in the attempt to account for my position as a male researcher and its implications for this research project and the participants (these implications are discussed further in Chapter Four).

From the beginning of this research project, I felt that it was important to address this issue openly with the participants. The following quotes are examples of what the participants said during different group interviews:

Caroline: When I read the leaflet I thought, 'Hum, a man ... why does he want to do it for? What does he want to know?' But now that I know you, it's okay.

Angela: I think having a bloke doing it anyway is ... The kids tend to see their father ... It is different to see the feller, instead of a woman there.

Denise: A feller saying that it is wrong rather than a woman saying it is wrong.

Sue: Yes, there is another male figure there who is saying that it is wrong.

Kate: I think it is a good thing that you are doing it rather than a woman doing it, because ... you can try and look at both sides. Being a man you can sort of understand male emotions and from what we are telling you and other women are telling you, you can try and understand what emotions women go through in that place as well as if it was a female doing it.

RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This chapter has set the scene for the thesis. It has presented the background of the research and has introduced the aim of the research and the main research questions. It has also described the theoretical approach that underpinned this

project and argued that the work of radical feminists has much to offer to the study of mothering and domestic violence. It has also addressed the issue of being a male researcher and some of the implications related to my position as man researching women's experiences of mothering and domestic violence.

The following two chapters present a review of the relevant literature, drawing primarily on the work of feminist and pro-feminist scholars in the fields of domestic violence and mothering. This review of the literature focuses on contemporary Britain, but it also refers extensively to work from Australia, Canada and the United States, as these four countries share historical, cultural and social-political similarities. Chapter Two focuses on the literature in the field of domestic violence. This chapter provides an overview of the research on the extent and consequences of domestic violence, as well as a theoretical framework for the understanding of domestic violence that is rooted in a radical feminist perspective. It also critically evaluates the ways in which the issue of mothering has been taken into account in the literature on domestic violence and on children's exposure to domestic violence.

Chapter Three engages with the feminist literature in the field of mothering, by applying a closer focus to one of the significant themes that emerged in the previous chapter: mother-blaming. This chapter is thus concerned with the processes through which women become seen as 'bad' mothers, which arises out of the institution of motherhood and of its dominant construction of 'good' mothering. It first considers the interconnected issues of women's actions and children's needs, which provide the main impetus for mother-blaming. It also considers the importance of the context in which mothering takes place and

women's social locations. Finally, this chapter also addresses the ways in which women have both integrated and resisted mother-blaming.

Chapter Four focuses on the empirical part of the study and considers the ways in which the theoretical assumptions – which drew upon the legacies of radical feminism – translated into the epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects of the project. This chapter addresses the epistemological considerations that underpinned this research in terms of the development of a feminist standpoint and justifies the choice of a qualitative and participative methodology. It also reviews and discusses the main aspects of the fieldwork and of the preparation, analysis and interpretation of the data. The women who participated in this study are also introduced in this chapter.

The following three chapters present the findings of this study, and emphasise the experiences and 'voices' of the women who took part in the research project.

Chapter Five proposes an insight into the institution of motherhood, which highlights the main themes that emerged from the data in regard to mothering and motherhood. These themes include the assumption that children are women's responsibility, the standards of 'good' mothering and the pervasiveness of mother-blaming. This insight into the institution of motherhood provides the backdrop for the following two chapters.

Chapter Six focuses on mothering in the context of domestic violence. This chapter first considers the ways in which women's mothering often constitutes a target in men's violence. It then provides an understanding of women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence, as well as during and after the separation process. It highlights both the difficulties involved in mothering and the multiple

strategies developed by women in these circumstances. This chapter also demonstrates the ways in which women's experiences of mothering in this context are influenced by the institution of motherhood.

Chapter Seven considers the issue of support for women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. This chapter considers women's experiences of contact with both their informal social networks and voluntary and statutory services, and first examines women's definitions of positive support. It also considers the extent to which women report the presence of positive support, and the ways in which their experiences reflect, and are influenced by, the institution of motherhood.

Chapter Eight proposes a discussion of the findings presented in the previous three chapters. This chapter locates the findings of the research within the existing literature in the field of domestic violence and mothering, and applies a closer focus to the issue of mother-blaming. This chapter first considers women's more general experiences of mothering and mother-blaming, and the development of an insight into the institution of motherhood. The following three sections consider the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence, the multiple strategies that abused women develop in order to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering, and the issue of support for women in regard to their experiences of mothering in this context. This chapter also highlights ways in which women can question, challenge and resist aspects of the institution of motherhood, including mother-blaming.

Chapter Nine is the concluding chapter. This chapter therefore revisits the literature and reviews the key findings from the research. It also discusses the implications of

the research in terms of support for abused women in regard to their mothering, and highlights the contribution made to current knowledge by this thesis. Finally, this chapter proposes directions for further research.

As we stood on the street corners, we met lots of young mothers who all complained about the same thing – isolation. They felt cut off in their homes. This is really what set Women's Aid in motion: I formed the idea of a community centre where women and their children could come to meet and escape, for a time, from loneliness. (Pizzey 1974, p. 9)

In her ground-breaking book *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours will Hear*, Erin Pizzey (1974) documents the development of Chiswick Women's Aid, which has often been seen as the first refuge for women living with domestic violence in Britain (see Hague and Malos 2005). The extract quoted above suggests that initial concerns and services for women and children living with domestic violence have developed from concerns with women's experiences of mothering. Nonetheless, it seems that these concerns with women's mothering have not been sustained either in the literature or in policies and practices in the area of domestic violence (for notable exceptions, see Radford and Hester 2001; Krane and Davies 2002; Radford and Hester 2006; Krane and Davies 2007). Indeed, Lorraine Radford and Marianne Hester (Radford and Hester 2001) argue that

Despite almost thirty years of research into and activism against violence against women, little has been written about mothering in the context of abuse, whether from the viewpoint of women's experiences, of children's experiences, or on the basis of review of social policy and academic discourses. (p. 135)

This chapter reviews the literature on domestic violence in order to present an understanding of the problem and to critically examine the ways in which the issue of mothering has been taken into account in this field. In the 1960s and 1970s, the issue of domestic violence came to the fore as a social problem in Britain and in

North America. This increased awareness resulted from the work of radical feminist activists and scholars, who argued that domestic violence provides a powerful illustration of the systematic oppression of women in the context of male domination (Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Schechter 1982; Dobash and Dobash 1992). In Britain, this work was connected to the women's movement and to the movement against domestic violence, which were involved in public campaigns and in the development of direct services for women and children living with domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Hague and Malos 2005). This work had influence at a legislative level but seems to have had limited influence on 'mainstream' services.

Over the last two decades, scholars have demonstrated a growing interest in the situation of children living with domestic violence (see Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995; Holden *et al.* 1998; Geffner *et al.* 2000; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001; Jaffe *et al.* 2004). Although a notable element of the work on children and domestic violence has drawn upon the legacies of radical feminism (see Mullender and Morley 1994a; McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002), there has been a general shift away from radical feminism. This can be explained by the development of a largely independent scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence, which has been largely influenced by psychological and developmental approaches (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled *et al.* 1995a; Holden *et al.* 1998a; Geffner *et al.* 2000; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001; Jaffe *et al.* 2004). In addition, the post-modern critique has recently attracted interest in the field of domestic violence and has raised different concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence (Featherstone and Trinder 1997; Davies and Krane 2003; Wexler 2006). Overall, the growing interest in the situation of children

living with domestic violence has reinforced the commitment of domestic violence services to work with children (Debbonaire 1994; Mullender *et al.* 1998; Hague *et al.* 2000) and has led to an increased awareness of domestic violence in 'mainstream' services (Stanley 1997; Humphreys and Stanley 2006; Rivett and Kelly 2006).

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the research on the extent and consequences of domestic violence. The second section draws upon the work of radical feminist scholars and proposes a theoretical framework for understanding domestic violence. This section also considers the ways in which the radical feminist scholarship on domestic violence has considered the situation of children living with domestic violence and the issue of mothering in this context. The third section focuses on children's exposure to domestic violence and considers the extent to which work in this area has drawn upon the legacies of radical feminism. It then considers the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence and the post-modern feminists' stance in regard to children and domestic violence. Finally, the fourth section considers a range of policies and practices for women and children living with domestic violence. Overall, this critical evaluation of the literature raises important issues regarding the conceptualisation of mothering in this context; these issues are highlighted throughout the chapter and summed up in the conclusion.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXTENT AND CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The extent of the problem of domestic violence has been notoriously difficult to fully establish (Johnson 1998; Hague and Malos 2005). In Britain, a multi-stage and multi-method study involved 1,000 individuals – 571 women and 429 men – with a wide age range and diversity in terms of both ethnicity and class (Mooney 2000a).

This research first explored what actions women would designate as domestic violence; 92 per cent of female respondents considered physical violence that results in bodily harm to be domestic violence, and mental cruelty was also seen as domestic violence by 80 per cent of the women. Threats of physical violence, physical violence that did not result in bodily harm and rape were also defined as domestic violence by the majority of the women. Furthermore, the findings of the survey suggested that considering any of these definitions of domestic violence, at least one-quarter to one-third of all women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. They also demonstrated a significant prevalence of domestic violence over the twelve months preceding the survey and highlighted the fact that domestic violence often involves repeated rather than isolated incidents (Mooney 2000a).

In the UK, the most reliable data on the prevalence of domestic violence comes from the British Crime Survey, a large-scale nationally representative survey of adults aged sixteen and over living in private households in England and Wales. This survey is now carried out annually and over the last few years there has been improvement in the way in which it has considered the issue of domestic violence. The 2005/06 British Crime Survey included a self-completion module on intimate violence and the concept of domestic violence included non-sexual, emotional or financial abuse, threats or physical force, as well as sexual assault and stalking by a current or former partner (Jansson 2007). The findings revealed that six per cent of women – and four per cent of men – had experienced one or more incident of domestic violence in the year prior to the survey and twenty-nine per cent of women – and eighteen per cent of men – had experienced one or more forms of domestic violence since the age of sixteen. Amongst the female victims of any forms of domestic violence since the age of sixteen, 92 per cent had experienced non-sexual

abuse, sixteen per cent had experienced sexual assault 26 per cent had experienced stalking. Six per cent of these women had experienced all three forms of domestic violence (Jansson 2007). These prevalence rates were similar to those shown by the 2004/05 British Crime Survey (Finney 2006).

Research evidence also highlights the importance of post-separation violence (Humphreys and Thiara 2003a; Abrahams 2007) – though the term ‘post-separation violence’ is problematic, as it implies a clear point of separation in the relationship. For instance, the findings of a multi-method study that involved 180 women who used domestic violence outreach services demonstrated that 76 per cent of the 161 women who were separated had experienced violence from their former partners after the end of the relationship; the violence experienced included threats, verbal and emotional abuse, as well as physical and sexual assaults (Humphreys and Thiara 2003a). The findings of this study suggested that black and minority ethnic women had experienced proportionally less post-separation violence in the six months following the end of the relationship, but that for those who had experienced post-separation violence, it had continued for a longer time.

There are clear consequences for women who have experienced domestic violence. For instance, the data from the 2001 British Crime Survey demonstrated that, amongst the women who had experienced domestic violence, 46 per cent of women sustained a minor physical injury (e.g. minor bruising, back ache, scratches), 20 per cent sustained a moderate physical injury (e.g. severe bruising, bleeding from cuts) and six per cent sustained severe injuries (e.g. internal injury, broken bone or teeth) during the worst incident experienced in the year prior to the survey (Walby and Allen 2004). In a review of the research literature on domestic violence

and women's physical health, Fraser (2003) points out that 'although injuries arising from physical violence are the most obvious health impact of domestic violence, in fact intimate partner abuse is associated with much more complex physical health impacts, many of them long-term, even when the woman is no longer in an abusive relationship' (p. 1). In this regard, a quantitative study conducted in the United States with a sample of 2005 women compared selected physical health problems of abused women and never abused women (Campbell *et al.* 2002). The findings revealed that abused women had more headaches, back pain, sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal bleeding, vaginal infections, pelvic pain, painful intercourse, urinary tract infections, appetite loss, abdominal pain and digestive problems. The authors conclude that 'abused women have a 50 per cent to 70 per cent increase in gynaecological, central nervous system, and stress-related problems, with women physically and sexually abused most likely to report problems' (Campbell *et al.* 2002, p. 1157).

In the most extreme cases, women die as a consequence of domestic violence. Indeed, domestic violence is an important context for homicide. Cases recorded by the police demonstrate that amongst the 766 deaths initially recorded as homicides in England and Wales in 2005/06, 33 per cent of homicide victims were female (Coleman and Reed 2007). Fifty-four per cent of female victims knew the main or only suspect and, of the female victims acquainted with the suspect, 61 per cent were killed by their partner, ex-partner or lover. In contrast, 38 per cent of male victims knew the main or only suspect and, of these male victims, twelve per cent were killed by their partner, ex-partner or lover. In total, 83 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner in 2005/06 (Coleman and Reed 2007).

There are also consequences for which the empirical evidence has provided a less clear picture, including issues for women's mental health. In this regard, data from the 2001 British Crime Survey demonstrated that, amongst the women who had experienced domestic violence, the worst incident experienced in the year prior to the survey resulted in mental or emotional problems for 31 per cent of the women (Walby and Allen 2004). The link between domestic violence and women's mental health was also explored in the study of domestic violence outreach services conducted by Humphreys and Thiara (2003b). Although the women who were involved in this study were more inclined to talk about 'emotional distress' in non-psychological and non-medical terms, an important theme that emerged in this study was that the women articulated a direct causal connection between the violence and abuse they had suffered and their mental ill-health.

Research on domestic violence has also identified issues related to women's pregnancy. For instance, data from a multi-methodological study conducted in the United States that involved 51 abused women demonstrated that the women who had been abused during pregnancy had experienced significantly more frequent and severe abuse throughout the course of their relationship and had been more severely injured by their partner than had those not abused during pregnancy (Campbell *et al.* 1998a). Another American study that involved 381 women – 128 respondents reported having experienced physical abuse during pregnancy – showed that the women who reported abuse during pregnancy also reported more risk factors associated with homicide (Campbell *et al.* 1998b). Campbell and her colleagues (Campbell *et al.* 1998b) conclude that 'a woman abused during pregnancy is being battered by a particularly dangerous man ... abused women are

not only at risk for homicide from the partner during pregnancy but also after the pregnancy' (p. 97).

THEORISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A RADICAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

It is important to remember how limited knowledge was at the beginning of the 1970s. At this point rape and sexual abuse were understood as random, rare events committed by disordered strangers. The terms domestic violence, sexual harassment, genital mutilation and sexual exploitation had yet to be formulated. This absence of name and social definition meant that in terms of formal knowledge these realities of women's lives did not exist (Kelly 1988). The creation of knowledge has, therefore, given social recognition to hidden and silenced experiences. (Kelly 1999, p. 120)

As noted above, the increased public awareness in relation to the issue of domestic violence in the 1960s and 1970s resulted primarily from the work of radical feminist activists and scholars (Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Schechter 1982; Dobash and Dobash 1992; Kelly 1999). In her work on the visions and struggles of the battered women's movement in the United States, Schechter (1982) points out that 'in the early 1970's, as they listened or reassessed their own experiences, women did more than provide housing for battered women... these women also uncovered, inch by inch, the sexist ideology that declared nothing wrong with battering a woman' (Schechter 1982, p. 201). Therefore, the theoretical perspective that emerged in the early stages of second wave feminism has grown 'inductively out of the day-to-day work of battered women and activists who struggled to make sense of the victimization they saw' (Yllö 2005, p. 22). This understanding has remained the most influential perspective in this field.

The most fundamental and enduring contribution made by feminists in this field has been to place the issues of gender and power at the centre of the analysis (Bograd 1988; Itzin 2000; Yllö 2005) and, in this respect, they have been concerned with

men's violence against women. As noted by Radford and her colleagues (Radford *et al.* 1996), it is not a question of '*people raping/battering/abusing people*' (Radford *et al.* 1996, p. 4, italics in the original). In this regard, it should be noted that the term 'domestic violence' is not necessarily the most appropriate term to describe this problem and is not the most consistent with a feminist perspective, as it obscures the gendered nature of the problem. Additional difficulties refer to the idea that the term 'violence' conveys a narrow meaning, which encompasses only physical abuse and excludes sexual, emotional, psychological or financial abuse (Kelly 1988; Mullender 1996). The term 'domestic' is also problematic, as it implies that the abused woman and her partner live together and that the violence only takes place in the home, and obscures the fact that the violence often continues after separation (Humphreys and Thiara 2003a). Moreover, 'the problem has been a private trouble for too long; it now needs to become a public issue' (Mullender 1996, p. 8). Despite these difficulties, the term 'domestic violence' is privileged in this thesis because of its common everyday use as well as its use in research, policies and practices (see also Mullender 1996).

In their use of violence, men's specific behaviours vary (Hearn 1996c, 1998), but these behaviours are designed to 'control, dominate and express authority and power' (Hanmer 1996, p. 8). In a community-based study that involved interviews with 129 women, the most common expression of women's definition of violence by individual men was the inability to avoid becoming involved in a situation and once involved being unable to control the process and outcomes of the situation (Hanmer and Saunders 1984). Despite this, abused women are not 'passive victims' (Kelly 1988); whilst feminist activists and scholars have often privileged the term 'survivors', some authors have argued that neither the term 'victim' nor the term

'survivor' adequately represents the experiences of these women (Kelly 1988; Radford and Hester 2006).

Domestic violence needs to be understood in relation to other forms of men's violence against women, as not to establish such a connection obscures the accumulation of individual, lifelong experiences of violence and their consequences (Kelly and Radford 1998). In this regard, the work of Liz Kelly (1988; see also Kelly 1987) has been highly influential. Based on the findings of a study that involved in-depth interviews with 60 women, Kelly (1988) developed the concept of a *continuum of sexual violence in order to address connections and distinctions at both experiential and theoretical levels*. The concept of a continuum of sexual violence enables us to discuss violence in a generic sense and to 'document and name the range of abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threats and force, whilst acknowledging that there are no clearly defined and discrete analytic categories into which men's behaviour can be placed' (Kelly 1988, p. 76). However, Kelly (1988) stresses that the concept of a continuum does not imply that there is a linear connection between different experiences, nor should it be interpreted as a statement about the relative seriousness of different forms of violence. Indeed, 'all forms of sexual violence are serious and... it is inappropriate to create a hierarchy of abuse within a feminist analysis' (p. 76).

Establishing connections between multiple forms of men's violence against women also highlights the structural dimension of the problem. Domestic violence – alongside other forms of men's violence against women – is a political issue that expresses the power relations of patriarchy and maintains male domination (Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Pahl 1985; Radford 1987; Bograd 1988;

Mullender 1996; Radford *et al.* 1996). In fact, 'although there are many ways that men as a group maintain women in oppressed social positions, violence is the most overt and effective means of social control' (Bograd 1988, p. 14). Despite differences amongst men (Hearn 1996c, 1998) and although many individual men refrain from using violence against their partners, 'virtually all men can use violence to subdue women and keep them subordinate if they choose or allow themselves to do so' (Mullender 1996, p. 63). Moreover, 'men as a class benefit from how women's lives are restricted and limited because of their fear of violence by husbands and lovers as well as by strangers' (Bograd 1988, p. 14).

In this context of male domination, there has been a general tendency to minimise men's violence and to blame the victims – women – rather than the perpetrators of violence (Pahl 1985; Hearn 1996c; Kelly and Radford 1996; Mullender 1996).

Based on a study that involved 60 men who had used violence towards women, Hearn (1996c) argues that men tend to minimise violence and to define it in very narrow terms; for men the paradigm of violence is physical violence and even some forms of physical violence tend to be excluded. He also argues that men's definitions of violence tend to dominate formal agencies, state bureaucracies and the legal system (Hearn 1996c). In the same vein, Kelly and Radford (1996) draw upon two empirical studies (see Radford 1987; Kelly 1988) and argue that women are systemically encouraged to minimise violence – and that women do minimise violence perpetrated against them. Women might be more likely to minimise violence perpetrated against them by their intimate partners (Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Mooney 2000a, 2000b) which can be partly explained by 'the barriers preventing women from speaking about their homes as anything but sanctuaries'

(Stanko 1988, p. 86). Certain groups of women have particular practical and material reasons for minimising such violence:

For women with disabilities leaving a violent partner involves the loss of her 'carer' and for some the prospect of a future in institutional care. For black women the reality of racism can create a tension between their experience of abuse, and a felt need to protect the community from intervention by white institutions, especially the police. Migrant women, the majority of whom are black, fear having their immigration status, their 'right to stay' investigated – and women may have 'no recourse to public funds' stamped on their passports. Lesbians may fear risk losing custody of their children if they leave abusive men. (Kelly and Radford 1996, p. 27-28)

This highlights the fact that domestic violence is experienced by women who are simultaneously privileged and/or oppressed by the power structures of race, class, sexuality, and/or dis/ability while being oppressed by gender (Radford *et al.* 1996; see also Krane *et al.* 2000; Sokoloff 2006). In this regard, Hanmer (2000) conducted a study that involved interviews with 60 women from diverse ethnic backgrounds – half of the women interviewed had personal or family origins from the Asian subcontinent – and argues that

There are many differences between the women interviewed in this study, but these cannot be placed neatly into the categories 'race', 'ethnicity' or even 'culture', when focusing on violence and the responses of women, men, the larger family and other informal relationships and groups. Differences often thought of as major, such as the type of marriage entered into by women and men, do not produce fundamentally different gendered experiences of violence. (p. 10)

In the same vein, Mama (2000) conducted an activist research project in London that was aimed at documenting the manifestations of domestic violence in the African-Caribbean and Asian communities and assessing the interventions of both statutory and voluntary organisations. This study involved interviews with over 100 abused women as well as interviews and consultations with a range of organisations. Mama (2000) argues that black women provided accounts of

violence that did not differ from similar descriptions given by white women, but the data suggested that black women may be particularly reluctant to seek support; this was partly due to the fact that 'the agencies that have moral and legal obligations to assist them are often staffed by people who hold racist views' (Mama 2000, p. 49).

Considering women and children 'together' within the family

The work of radical feminist activists and scholars in the field of domestic violence has clearly focused on women's experiences. However, this work has also been concerned with the situation of children living with domestic violence – contrary to what has been argued by its critics (see Featherstone and Trinder 1997). In fact, by establishing connections between different forms of violence (Kelly 1988; Kelly and Radford 1998) and locating the problem of domestic violence within the wider context of male domination (Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Mullender 1996), radical feminists have been bound to raise concerns regarding the situation of children. As pointed out by Dobash and Dobash (1979) in relation to physical punishment, 'children are the most frequent targets of what might be referred to as casual or legitimate applications of physical force' (p. 10).

Within this perspective, women and children have been generally considered as being 'together' victims of men's violence; this work has emphasised the interconnectedness of men's violence towards women and children. In this regard, two empirical studies that were carried out in the United States in the 1980s have been highly influential – though they have been criticised on methodological grounds (Morley and Mullender 1994). The first study involved a voluntary non-representative sample of 1,000 women who had experienced domestic violence and considered the importance of child abuse within these families (Bowker *et al.*

1988). The findings demonstrated that 70 per cent of the 775 women who had children with the domestic violence perpetrator reported that their children had also been abused by their partners. The finding also revealed that the violence towards children was less severe than the violence towards women, but showed a positive association between the frequency and severity of domestic violence and the frequency and severity of child abuse. Based on these findings, Bowker and his colleagues (Bowker *et al.* 1988) argue that both domestic violence and child abuse constitute men's efforts to control and dominate the other members of their families.

The second study took place in a large hospital and looked at all the 116 cases registered over a twelve-month period for suspected child abuse (Stark and Flitcraft 1988). By matching these children's cases to their mothers' hospital records, the findings revealed that 45 per cent of the women had a medical history indicative of physical domestic violence and another five per cent had a history of 'marital conflict' where it was not possible to determine if physical violence had occurred.

The findings of this study also showed that, amongst the families where there had been domestic violence, approximately 50 per cent of the abused children had been abused by the perpetrator of domestic violence and 35 per cent had been abused by their mothers; the fathers were more than three times as likely to be the child abuse perpetrators in families where there had been domestic violence than in families with no history of domestic violence. Moreover, although a minority of children had been registered for documented physical abuse, the findings suggested that the children of women with a history of domestic violence were twice as likely as the children of women with no such history to have been registered for physical abuse. Stark and Flitcraft (1988) concluded that

The findings support an analysis of child abuse as a component of female subordination ... Not only are the children of battered mothers significantly more likely to be physically abused than neglected ... but the batterer also appears to be the typical source of child abuse, not a mother 'overwhelmed with problems'. (p. 253)

The radical feminist literature on domestic violence has also fed into a critique of the family, which has been conceptualised as a social institution that maintains male domination. According to Bograd (1988), 'wife abuse is not viewed as a rare and deviant phenomenon that results from the breakdown of family functioning, but as a predictable and common dimension of normal family life as it is currently articulated in our society' (p. 14). Based on her study that involved 60 women from diverse ethnic backgrounds, Hanmer (2000) argues that men obtain many advantages as men, but also as husbands, fathers and sons:

The cultural boundaries of family and community accountability for men incorporate privileging male over female. Men as head of households have the role of maintaining family hierarchies and of ensuring that women and children recognize and respond to the authority vested in sons, husbands and fathers. (Hanmer 2000, p. 15)

It is in this context that the issue of mothering has been considered in the work of radical feminists in the field of domestic violence. For instance, in one of the early accounts, Dobash and Dobash (1979) suggest that

Child rearing, domestic labor, and personal and psychic services are thought to be the major responsibilities of the wife ... Accordingly, a 'good' wife has little time apart from her family and a 'good' mother is bound even more closely to the home: going out means leaving her duties and responsibilities. (p. 90)

In the same vein, Hanmer (2000) more recently argues that

The reality is that men can place their affections, loyalties, income and time elsewhere and still maintain their position as son, husband and father in the eyes of others. The reverse situation is not possible for a woman. She owes

him affection, loyalty, income/money and time, expressed as both physical and emotional labour. Women who place their affections, loyalties, income and time elsewhere are inevitably defined by others as bad wives and mothers, against whom social sanctions must and will be introduced and enforced. (p. 19)

In term of theorising mothering in the context of domestic violence, three accounts have been particularly significant. The first of these accounts is the work of Stark and Flitcraft (1988), which proposes the concept of 'patriarchal mothering' and suggests that the combination of male control, dominant ideas about mothering and sanctions used to enforce these ideas has contributed to the entrapment of women and to the system of inequality from which violence against women and children originates:

Ideologically, battering and child abuse are connected by the presumption that women's responsibilities as wives and mothers supercede their personal needs and social rights, including their need for independence and physical safety. By normalizing these responsibilities through theories of women's character and mother-child bonding, psychology provides the health and social services with a rationale for making the delivery of vital resources contingent on women's acceptance of this ideology. By subsuming a woman's personal development to the stability of her family and the well-being of her children, both family stability and children's welfare are jeopardized. (p. 254)

The second account is the theoretical reflection initiated by Liz Kelly (1994) on the interconnectedness of domestic violence and child abuse. A significant theoretical contribution made by Kelly (1994) refers to the 'double level of intentionality', which means that 'an act directed towards one individual is at the same time intended to affect another or others' (p. 47). Examples of this include abusing a woman in front of her child or abusing a child in front of her or his mother in order to control, both or making a woman watch or participate in, the abuse of her child. Kelly (1994) also points out that there has seldom been discussion about the ways in which domestic violence affects women's relationships with their children and discusses some of

the impacts of domestic violence on mothering. She suggests that, for some women, bearing and caring for their children is so connected to their experiences of domestic violence that it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to disconnect these two issues. This may happen when children were conceived as the consequence of rape, when continual pregnancies have been used as a control strategy, when children have been encouraged or have chosen to side with the abusive man, and when children have been drawn into the abuse of their mothers. Kelly (1994) argues that ‘one simple and key principle from which we can begin is that *women protection is frequently the most effective form of child protection* (p. 53, italics in the original), but that there is a need to explore further issues around mothering in the context of domestic violence. This should include the fact that some women are forced to sacrifice a child in order to protect themselves or to protect other children, choose to have children as the only source of finding positive meaning and identity in their lives, use violence either to pre-empt harsher treatment from their partners or as an expression of their own frustration and distress, or lose confidence in their abilities and make inconsistent responses in relation to rules, boundaries and discipline.

Finally, the work of Lorraine Radford and Marianne Hester (Radford and Hester 2001, 2006) has also made a significant contribution in relation to the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence. In their most recent account, Radford and Hester (2006) suggest that the concept of gender entrapment developed by Beth Richie (1995, cited in Radford and Hester 2006) provides a useful framework for exploring mothering and domestic violence:

Gender entrapment refers to a process where African-American women are ‘set up to fail’ in their relationships and in their life ambitions as a

consequence of being marginalized by the inter-sectional disadvantages of living through violence, racism, sexism and poverty ... We are using the idea of gender entrapment in this book to look at the marginalization and 'failure' of battered women as mothers. Gender entrapment is a useful idea because it allows us to look at not just the affects [sic] of violence (harm to health) and what violent men do to entrap women and how women respond, but also the broader social, cultural and political context influencing how women see themselves as mothers and their partners as fathers. (Radford and Hester 2006, p. 28)

Radford and Hester (2006) bring together findings from six empirical studies on domestic violence and argue that 'overcoming gender entrapment is a complex process in which women deal with domestic violence on a daily basis and try to protect and shield their children from abuse' (p. 47). The findings from these studies revealed that the women had reported steps they had taken to protect their children, which challenges the notion that 'women who have lived with domestic violence will be inadequate parents' (p.19). However, this work focuses on policies and practices and its scope did not allow the authors to engage with the feminist literature in the field of mothering, which means that it makes a limited contribution in terms of theorising mothering in the context of domestic violence.

Overall, radical feminist activists and scholars in the field of domestic violence have been primarily concerned with the experiences of women. Nonetheless, the work in this area has raised concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence and has fed into a critique of the social institution of the family. It is in this context that the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence has been considered. In this regard, the accounts that have been reviewed above have raised interesting points and have highlighted the importance of further exploring this issue, particularly from women's experiences.

A FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the early 1990s, a broad consensus emerged amongst scholars in North America and in Britain regarding the fact that too little attention had been paid to the situation of children living with domestic violence (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled 1993; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995a). In contrast with the work reviewed above, for these scholars the main concern was not with the interconnectedness of violence against women and children, but with children witnessing domestic violence or children's exposure to domestic violence. Children's exposure to domestic violence generally includes the fact of children directly observing the violence, hearing the violence from another room in the house or being exposed to the consequences of violence without seeing or hearing the violence (Mullender and Morley 1994b; Peled *et al.* 1995b; Holden 1998; Fantozzo and Mohr 1999; Jouriles *et al.* 2001). This concern was initially informed by descriptions of the problems that had been displayed by children who had been accommodated in refuges, including 'physical health problems, acting-out problems, and a wide range of disorders reflecting low self-concept, fear and anxiety, and social isolation' (Jaffe *et al.* 1990, p. 35). In the United Kingdom, the NCH Action for Children study conducted by Abrahams (1994) has contributed to the increased awareness regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence. The empirical study was conducted in 108 NCH Action for Children's family centres across Britain and involved a survey with 108 women and in-depth interviews with fifteen women and with seven children. The findings demonstrate that 87 per cent of the women said that they believed that their children were aware of the violence at home and that almost three quarters of the women said that their children had witnessed violent incidents. Furthermore, more than a quarter of the women said that their violent

partners had also physically abused their children. The findings of this study suggest that there are short-term and long-term effects for children living with domestic violence; nine out of ten of the women thought that their children had been affected by the violence in the short term and more than five out of six of the women thought that their children had been affected in the long term (Abrahams 1994).

It is arguably more complicated to establish the extent of children's exposure to domestic violence than to determine the extent of the violence itself, due partly to the conceptualisation of the term 'exposure' (Fantuzzo and Mohr 1999; Jouriles *et al.* 2001). Therefore, estimates of the extent of children's exposure to domestic violence vary greatly (Edleson 1999; Fantuzzo and Mohr 1999). The estimates that have been the most often cited come from the United States, mainly from the work of Carlson (1984) and Straus (1992). Based on an analysis derived from the data from a national survey on family violence (see Straus *et al.* 1980 cited in Carlson 1984), Carlson (1984) estimates that 'at least 3.3 million children yearly are at risk of exposure to parental violence' (p. 160). According to Straus (1992), 'each year more than 10 million American children witness a physical assault between their parents' (p. 98). Based on the 1985 National Family Violence Survey, Straus (1992) estimates that 'at least a third of American children have witnessed violence between their parents, and most have endured repeated instances of these painful and distressing events' (p. 98). In the United Kingdom, the findings of the first prevalence study were published in 2000 and, based on a general population sample of 2,869 young adults (1,235 men and 1,634 women), demonstrated that 26 per cent of the respondents had at some time in their childhood seen physical violence between their carers. For forty-five per cent of these respondents, the violence had been constant or frequent (Cawson *et al.* 2000).

This section of the chapter identifies three trends in the literature on children's exposure to domestic violence. The work that constitutes the first of these trends has drawn upon the legacies of radical feminism. The second trend refers to the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence, which has been underpinned by psychological and developmental approaches. In contrast with the first trend that has been significant in Britain, the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence has primarily developed in North America. The last trend has drawn upon the post-modern critique of radical feminism in the field of domestic violence.

Drawing upon the legacies of radical feminism

A notable trend can be identified in accounts that have primarily drawn upon a radical feminist understanding of domestic violence and have considered simultaneously the situations of women and children. In this regard, a significant contribution has been the book edited by Audrey Mullender and Rebecca Morley (1994a) on children living with domestic violence, which brings together several accounts located within this theoretical perspective. In the introductory chapter of this book, the authors clearly state that

women's and children's interests may conflict but, except where this is demonstrably and irresolvably the case, the most effective and cost effective way to help children is to understand what is happening to their mothers and to work in alliance with them. (Mullender and Morley 1994b, p. 10)

The need to consider simultaneously the situations of women and children was also highlighted in the two largest qualitative studies on children's experiences of domestic violence that have been conducted in the United Kingdom (McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002); although these two studies focused clearly on the situation

of children living with domestic violence, the researchers considered the experiences of women alongside the experiences of children. The first of these studies involved interviews with 54 children and 48 women and demonstrated that both the women and the children had experienced multiple forms of men's violence and that the children had been extensively exposed to the abuse of their mothers, which included incidents of violence during the women's pregnancy and the men's use of children in the abuse of the women (McGee 2000). In this study, McGee (2000) states that the children had reported feeling afraid, sad, angry, powerless, ashamed, and stigmatised as a result of living with violence. She also identified multiple effects of the violence on the children's health and education and on the relationships they had had with their mothers, fathers and members of the extended family. Although this study did not focus on the issue of mothering, it does provide interesting information about the relationships between the children and their mothers. McGee (2000) argues that the relationships between the children and their mothers was particularly affected when the children appeared to imitate the aggressor's behaviours and used violence toward their mothers and that, overall, the children either found that their relationships with their mothers had improved as a consequence of the violence or 'blamed their mothers for making their fathers leave, for splitting up the family and for "taking" the violence for so long' (p. 83).

The second qualitative study on children's experiences of domestic violence – which was part of a larger research project – involved interviews with 54 children, 24 women and fourteen professionals and revealed similar findings to those reported by McGee (2000) in term of the children's experiences of violence (Mullender *et al.* 2002). Mullender and her colleagues (2002) paid considerable attention to the influence of domestic violence on the relationships the children had

had with their mothers and explicitly addressed the issue of mothering. They connected the women's mothering to the 'rhetorics of motherhood' and argue that

Domestic violence creates an environment deeply uncondusive to achieving even 'good enough' mothering. That so many women do resolve this impossible conundrum is testimony to their spirit, endurance and determination. That many are unable to surmount the obstacles constantly and consistently should surprise no one. (p. 157)

All the women who participated in this study believed that the violence had affected their 'parenting' and they commonly reported that the violent incidents and the anxiety – being constantly 'on guard' – meant that they were exhausted and had limited energy to devote to their children. The authors argue that the women's mothering had been orientated 'not around what they felt and believed was good for children but around efforts to limit further harm to themselves or their children' (p. 159) and that a significant proportion of these women 'believed that they had made considerable efforts to protect their children' (p. 164). Finally, Mullender and her colleagues (Mullender *et al.* 2002) point out that there had been instances where the needs and perceptions of women and children had been incompatible and argue that this can be linked to the lack of communication between women and children:

The linked processes of self-protection and protection of others combine for both children and women to create contexts in which silence had appeared the best, or at least safest, option. But silence, in turn, had meant that it was possible to misread and misunderstand each other's knowledge, needs and motivations. (p. 167)

A child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence

Notwithstanding these important contributions, most of the work on children's exposure to domestic violence has developed within what can be seen as a largely

independent scholarship (Peled *et al.* 1995a; Holden *et al.* 1998; Geffner *et al.* 2000; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001; Jaffe *et al.* 2004). These scholars have been primarily concerned with establishing the ways in which exposure to domestic violence impacts on children and their work has been underpinned by psychological and developmental approaches. Their stance in relation to feminism has been ambiguous – some authors have been more sympathetic to feminism than others – and it appears that the work reviewed above has not permeated this scholarship.

A large number of quantitative studies have been designed to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which exposure to domestic violence impacts on children, particularly on their behaviours and on their development. Several reviews have summarised the findings of these studies (for instance, see Fantuzzo and Lindquist 1989; Kolbo *et al.* 1996; Edleson 1999a; Rossman 2001; Harold and Howarth 2004). In his review, Edleson (1999a) points out that most studies have drawn upon samples of children accommodated in domestic violence refuges and that almost all these studies have relied exclusively on women's reports of their children's problems. Edleson (1999a) focuses on 31 research articles – that were selected on the basis of four quality criteria – and argues that a series of problems have been statistically associated with recent witnessing of domestic violence, including behavioural, emotional and cognitive problems. He also identifies long-term developmental problems. The influence of psychological and developmental approaches is made clear in the review of the long-term effects of children's exposure to domestic violence conducted by Rossman (2001). Rossman (2001) argues that long-term prospective studies are the most satisfactory in an empirical sense, but that

Still another way of defining long-term impact ... is in terms of developmental projection or estimation. This means that when one determines the developmental skill level for an exposed child, it is sometimes possible to discern a likely developmental trajectory. (p. 36)

She therefore concludes that a useful way of thinking about the long-term effects of exposure to domestic violence is to recognise that 'exposure at any age can create disruptions that can interfere with the accomplishment of development tasks, an early exposure may create more severe disruptions by affecting the subsequent chain of developmental tasks' (Rossman 2001, p. 58).

The increased risk for children who are exposed to domestic violence to be abused is seen as an important consequence of domestic violence (Appel and Holden 1998; Edleson 1999b). In the same vein, ideas such as the 'cycle of violence' or the 'cross-generational transmission of violence' have also underpinned this work (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled *et al.* 1995b), which suggest that children who have been exposed to domestic violence will themselves engage in violent relationships, either as perpetrators or as victims. While this work may provide useful information, caution is needed when considering the findings of these studies. First, although the authors of these studies talk about the 'effects' or the 'impacts' of children's exposure to domestic violence, these findings in fact indicate associations between variables rather than causal relationships (Edleson 1999a). Moreover, the findings report group trends and tend to obscure the variability of children's individual experiences of domestic violence (Edleson 1999a, 2004). Indeed, because the focus of these studies has been placed on 'problems', the authors have generally not emphasised the fact that some children who have been exposed to domestic violence have not displayed more problems than children who have not been so exposed. For instance, children who live with domestic violence do not all engage in

violent relationships as adults and not all adults who engage in violent relationships have experienced violence as children – and even when this is the case it is not always possible to establish a causal relationship (see Morley and Mullender 1994; Radford and Hester 2006). Although scholars have recently considered the issue of 'resilience' in children exposed to domestic violence (Hughes *et al.* 2001; Graham-Bermann and Halabu 2004), most studies have drawn upon unproblematised constructions of children, recognising them little or no agency.

Although some of the work that has focused on children's exposure to domestic violence has been sympathetic to feminism (for instance, see Mohr *et al.* 2001), there has been a general move away from a feminist understanding of domestic violence within this scholarship. These scholars have tended to privilege a gender-neutral and more individualist perspective on domestic violence, which has frequently been conceptualised as an extreme form of marital conflict (Cummings 1998; Harold and Howart 2004). This move away from a feminist understanding of domestic violence can be explained, in part, by the child-centredness of this scholarship and the idea that both men's violence towards women and women's violence towards men can be important from the perspective of a witnessing child (Jouriles *et al.* 2001). According to Jouriles and his colleagues (Jouriles *et al.* 2001), 'it is possible that husband-to-wife violence and wife-to-husband violence – although different from one another in form, function, and consequences – both influence child adjustment' (p.15).

The child centredness of this scholarship also means that women have been relegated to the periphery; women have not been considered in their own right, but solely in relation to their children, i.e. in terms of their mothering. Indeed, the term

'women' has often been replaced by the term 'mothers' and concepts such as 'violence against women' and 'battered women' have often been replaced by 'violence against mothers' and 'battered mothers' (for instance, see Peled *et al.* 1995b). At the same time, the gender-neutral perspective that has been privileged within this perspective means that mothering has often been conceptualised in terms of 'parenting' (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000, 2001).

Despite the fact that the focus has been placed on children, 'parenting' has been central within this scholarship; because it has been seen as being determinant in the protection of children from domestic violence and as being a key factor in how children are affected by their exposure to the violence (Holden 1998; Holden *et al.* 1998b; Edleson 1999a; Fortin *et al.* 2000; Jaffe and Crooks 2005). In this context, the use of the concept 'parenting' obscures the fact that it is women's behaviours that have been at the centre of the analysis. Indeed, Edleson (1999a; see also Edleson 1998) points out that 'because mothers and children are often more available for study, it is easier to collect data on these relationships, but this unfortunately leads to findings that focus on mothers' problems, rather than the factors that created them' (p. 863).

Overall, the literature on children's exposure to domestic violence has presented a deficit model of mothering, which focuses on women's 'failures' as mothers. For instance, in their work on the links between research and interventions for children exposed to domestic violence, Pepler and her colleagues (Pepler *et al.* 2000) argue that 'the problem facing both the mothers and children in families at risk is that women who are abused have few resources to bring to the extremely demanding task of parenting' (p. 42) and that, as a result, 'it is not surprising... if these mothers

fall short in providing the nurturance and support necessary for the optimal development of their children' (p. 42). In their work on the 'parenting behaviors and beliefs of battered women', Holden and his colleagues (Holden *et al.* 1998b) have conducted three interconnected quantitative studies. The first of these studies involved a sample of 37 abused women and a comparative group of 37 women who had not experienced domestic violence and looked at abused women's child-rearing behaviours and beliefs. The second study involved a sample of 30 abused women and a comparison group of 28 women and replicated the first study with more attention to differences according to ethnicity. Finally, the third study was a short-term longitudinal study of changes in the 'parenting' of abused women six months after the end of the violent relationship, which involved a sample of 50 women. The findings of these studies revealed that 'on the vast majority of measures assessing child-rearing behaviors, battered women from a shelter do not differ significantly from nonabused community mothers' (Holden *et al.* 1998b, p. 325). Moreover,

A second general finding is that many of the mothers in violent marriages do indeed engage in aggressive behaviour toward their children. However, community mothers also engage in child-directed aggression; there was relatively little difference between the battered and comparison mothers on the variable. (p. 326)

Finally, there appears to be a significant improvement for women and children six months after the end of the violent relationship, as the women reported 'significant decreases in the rates of stress and depressive symptoms, and they perceived their children as having few behavior problems' (p. 326). Notwithstanding these findings, the authors note that 'the question of what is "adequate" child rearing is difficult to determine' (p. 314) and argue that 'although mothers from violent and matched-comparison homes did not differ on a variety of child-rearing measures, that does

not mean that the quality of mothering was necessarily good or adequate' (p. 314).

They then add:

Ultimately, adequacy is best judged as a function of child outcomes. Given the high rates of child behaviour problems in the violent homes, it could be argued that the mothers were not providing good-enough parenting to compensate for the toxic environment. Perhaps a mother in a maritally violent home needs to engage in certain parenting behaviours above and beyond what may be needed in non-violent homes in order to be judged as adequate for the violent home context. (p. 314)

In addition to the adoption of a deficit model of mothering, this scholarship tends to pathologise women's mothering. For instance, Stephens (1999) interviewed 26 women in order to develop 'a deeper understanding of what makes a given caretaker respond actively or passively to a child's need of protection from violence' (p. 732). She argues that

Although the trauma of being battered unquestionably plays a part in inaction and in spill over of the violence onto the children, it does not solely account for why some battered women actively protect their children and why others are more passive... It seems reasonable to assume that the impact of domestic violence on parenting behavior is mediated in part by individual experiences and expectation regarding childhood, children and childrearing – that is by the mother's internal mental representation of herself, her child and what constitutes appropriate caregiving. There is high concordance between mothers' internal representations of their own early attachment experiences and the quality of their infants' attachment to them. (p. 733).

Stephens (1999) identifies three main themes that emerged from the data. The first theme refers to the women's tendency to 'adultify' their children, which involves 'imputing motives of adult complexity and (usually) malice to children out of frustration when the child literally does not have the neurological capacity for impulse control expected of them' (p. 735). She argues that 'adultification' happens, for instance, when women view their children as embodying the hated characteristics of their partners, they blame their children instead of their partners

and they 'parentify' their children – thus creating role reversal. The second theme refers to the women being 'psychologically trapped', which impeded their 'ability to see clearly their children's need to be protected from batterers' (p. 737). These 'traps' can be found in women's struggle to leave their violent partners because they are their children's fathers, women's 'denial' that their children witnessed or were affected by the violence and in women's convictions that the batterer loves the children and that the children love the batterer. Finally, the third theme refers to the women's 'intact caregiving', when women see that their children need to be protected from the violence and take steps to ensure that protection. Stephens (1999) argues that

What these women had in common was a strong internal mental model of caregiving that predated their involvement with their respective partners. This model included a set of realistic expectations of young children, an ability to empathize with them and the strongly held belief that children deserve to be protected from harm or potential harm. (p. 741)

In regard to the issue of mothering/'parenting' in the context of domestic violence, the most extensive work has been produced by Alytia Levendosky and her colleagues (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000; Levendosky *et al.* 2000; Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2001; Levendosky *et al.* 2003; Huth-Bocks *et al.* 2004). This work arose from the observation that little attention had been paid to 'the effects of the violence on women's ability to parent in this type of dangerous environment' (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000, p. 26). Levendosky and Graham-Bermann (2000) draw upon the ecological model of parenting developed by Belsky (1980; see also Belsky and Vondra 1989) and argue that 'the traumatic effects of domestic violence on women's mental health should be added to the ecological model as a mediator of the effect of violence on women's parenting' (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000, p. 26). In their theoretical model, the

context in which 'parenting' takes place (i.e. violence) impacts on 'parenting' (i.e. warmth, control, child-centredness and effectiveness) through its traumatic effects on women's psychological functioning. Their empirical work involved 120 women through a quantitative methodology and the findings supported their ecological model of parenting and trauma theory in understanding the effects of domestic violence on women and children (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2001). As part of this research, Levendosky and her colleagues (Levendosky *et al.* 2000) included three open-ended questions at the end of their questionnaire, which aimed at exploring women's perspectives on the ways in which the violence had affected their 'parenting'. In total, 95 women provided answers to these questions and the majority of these women reported that the violence affected their 'parenting' and identified ways in which they would have differed as parents if they had not had a violent partner. The authors argue that

In their descriptions of when parenting was most difficult, few of the women's parenting concerns related directly to their partner's violence. Rather, many women emphasized the difficulty of meeting children's needs as a single and/or distressed parent. (Levendosky *et al.* 2000, p. 267)

Moreover, these women reported that the violence had had positive effects on their 'parenting', such as providing increased empathy and caring towards their children, increased protectiveness and explicit guidance about the importance not to repeat the violence and working to prevent or buffer the impact of the violence on their children. Another qualitative study explored the strategies adopted by women who had experienced domestic violence in order to protect themselves and their children (Mohr *et al.* 2001), Mohr and her colleagues (Mohr *et al.* 2001) conducted a content analysis of three focus groups that involved ten African-American women and highlighted the ingenuity with which these women had protected themselves and

their children from the violence in their homes and their communities. In regard to the violence in their homes, their strategies had involved withdrawing to keep peace, turning to self-injurious behaviors as a means of control, forewarning their partners of the consequences of any potentially injurious actions, and fighting back. These authors conclude that 'competence is contextually situated and we must suspend preconceived notions of "what works" in view of the complexity of these contexts' (p. 90).

Children and domestic violence in the post-modern critique

Over the last decade, the work that has drawn upon the post-modern critique of radical feminism has attracted some interest in the field of domestic violence (Featherstone and Trinder 1997; Davies and Krane 2003), and this work has been particularly critical of the ways in which radical feminists have considered the situation of children living with domestic violence. A good illustration of this can be found in the work of Brid Featherstone and Liz Trinder (Featherstone and Trinder 1997) on domestic violence and child welfare:

Over the last few years these distinctive spheres have begun to overlap as feminist discourse on domestic violence has encroached into the child welfare arena. Attention has expanded beyond violence between adults to explore the linkages between adult (male) violence and child (dis)welfare. This initiative has been framed entirely within the dominant feminist discourse, thereby re-emphasizing men's responsibility for domestic violence and the double dangerousness of men as both partners and fathers. In doing so it presents an inviolable alliance between women and their children. (p. 150)

Although their reading of the work of radical feminists in the area of domestic violence does not entirely correspond to what has been presented above, Featherstone and Trinder (1997) emphasise the necessity to problematise the

relationship between women and children and argue that 'there are problems in assuming that women and children's interests coincide' (p. 153). They stress that

This is not to argue that women do not often fight for their children's well-being. But there is a problem in assuming that they always do, and there is a further problem in developing policies which assume they will. In so doing we contribute to already very restrictive societal assumptions that mothers should always love their children. (p. 153)

The issue of mothering has thus been central in this work, but the concern has not been with women's oppression. Instead, Featherstone (1996) argues that this perspective 'enables mother's, father's and children's positions to be interrogated in a way which addressed the complexity of the relations involved and acknowledged the different levels at which problems exist' (p. 187). She suggests that it holds more potential to explain the issue of women's violence towards children (Featherstone 1996; Lavergne *et al.* 2001a).

The work in this area has also stressed the theoretical potential of concepts such as maternal subjectivity and maternal ambivalence. For instance, a recent clinical study involved three women who had requested psychotherapy due to 'feeling overwhelmed by their complex psychosocial dilemmas of mothering while contending with abusive ex-partners' (Wexler 2006, p. 2). In this study, Wexler (2006) explored the complexities of maternal subjectivity and feelings of maternal ambivalence experienced by these women. This study emphasised the women vacillating between 'love and hate, relief, and jealous towards their children when the children expressed affection and sometimes preference for the father' (p. 3) and highlighted the 'fear of the ex-male's verbal, physical, and/or financial intimidations exacerbated the women's maternal connections with their children' (p. 3).

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES WITH WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This section of the chapter discusses some of the implications that the empirical and theoretical developments presented above have had on contemporary policies and practices with women and children living with domestic violence in Britain.

Focusing on policies and practices is not intended to minimise the importance of informal support, as families and friends appear to constitute significant sources of support for women and children who have experienced domestic violence (see Wilcox 2000, 2006). For instance, based on a qualitative study that involved 20 women who had experienced domestic violence, Wilcox (2000) argues that an important factor that enabled these women to avoid continued violence after separation was the extent of social support they received, but also points out that these women had greatly diminished support networks as a result of the violence. Nonetheless, the work on this issue has been limited (see also Radford and Hester 2001).

As noted above, the work of radical feminist activists and scholars has had a significant influence on the public recognition of the problem of domestic violence and on the development of legislative measures to protect women victims of violence (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Kelly 1999; Harwin and Barron 2000). These legislative measures include the Family Law Act 1996 and the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

Typically, services for women who have experienced domestic violence have developed in the voluntary sector. In Britain, Women's Aid has been the main organisation providing accommodation and outreach services for women who have

experienced domestic violence and their children, and these services have largely drawn upon a radical feminist understanding of domestic violence:

The Women's Aid national network of services is based on a common approach: to believe women and children's experiences of abuse, and make their safety a priority; to support and empower women to take control of their own lives; to recognise and care for the needs of children affected by domestic violence. The guiding principle behind Women's Aid's advocacy role and services was the understanding of the central importance of the survivor's perspective ... Domestic violence is recognised as part of a social and structural context of unequal power relationships between women and men. (Harwin and Barron 2000, p. 206)

Overall, women have consistently rated refuges more positively than other agencies and services (Mullender and Hague 2001).

As mentioned above, radical feminists in the field of domestic violence have long recognised the interconnectedness of violence against women and children (Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Kelly 1994) and have, more recently, focused on the issue of child's exposure to domestic violence (Mullender and Morley 1994a; McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002). Consequently, the organisations working with women who have experienced domestic violence have also provided services for their children and have developed an expertise in working with children who have experienced domestic violence (Ball 1990; Debbonaire 1994; Higgings 1994; Hague *et al.* 1996; Hague *et al.* 2000). For instance, statistics from Women's Aid Federation of England show that a total of 18,569 women and 23,084 children were accommodated and supported by refuges during the year 2003/04 (Women's Aid Federation of England 2007). A multi-method study that aimed at investigating and highlighting the contribution of children's workers in refuges demonstrated that on minimal resources, refuges have been innovative, insightful and visionary in their work with children (Hague *et al.* 1996). However, this is by no means universal, and

many children groups and the adults who work with them are regarded as being less important. Based on the findings from the qualitative part of this study, Mullender and her colleagues (Mullender *et al.* 1998) highlighted the perceived importance to refuge workers of doing direct work with children, but also of doing work with and through their mothers. The authors noted that the workers were 'careful not to take over from mothers but to work with their permission, and often through them, to encourage good parenting and to meet children's specific needs' (Mullender *et al.* 1998, p. 90). They also noted that 'on an everyday basis, women remained responsible for their children ... workers recognised, though, that women were under stress and sometimes unable to meet their children's needs without help, for a range of reasons' (p. 90). Moreover, Mullender and her colleagues (Mullender *et al.* 2002) identified the 'no violence principle' that was seen as fundamental by the workers and had underpinned the workers' views of women's mothering: 'workers in all the refuges visited were devoting their energies to finding the best ways of promoting a non-violent atmosphere, engaging with mothers to talk honestly about discipline problems and to explore alternatives' (p. 93). These observations suggest that refuge workers tend to reproduce taken-for-granted dominant ideas about mothering and – to some extent – draw upon the deficit model of mothering prevalent in the literature on child's exposure to domestic violence (see above).

More recently, the work on children's experiences of domestic violence (McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Mullender 2006) and the scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000a, 2000b; Levendosky *et al.* 2000; Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2001; Levendosky *et al.* 2003; Huth-Bocks *et al.* 2004) seem to have resulted in a pressure on domestic

violence services to directly address issues around mother-child relationships (Rabenstein and Lehmann 2000; Côté *et al.* 2006; Humphreys *et al.* 2006; Thiara *et al.* 2006). In Britain, Humphreys and her colleagues (Humphreys *et al.* 2006) have recently conducted an action research in collaboration with refuges that aimed at developing activities to facilitate communication between women and children in the aftermath of domestic violence, because the earlier work of Mullender and her colleagues (Mullender *et al.* 2000) revealed this to be problematic. This work was also based on the idea that 'to make judgements about a woman's parenting capacity without providing opportunities and resources to support the relationship between mothers and children may perpetuate, rather than ameliorate, the effects of abuse' (Humphreys *et al.* 2006, p. 61). Although these activities seem to have been welcomed by the children, the women and the workers (Humphreys *et al.* 2006), such work should be considered with caution. Without a concomitant critical reflection on dominant ideas about mothering, there is a risk that it could bring abused women's mothering under more scrutiny and emphasise their 'failures' as mothers.

These concerns have been echoed in the work of Julia Krane and Linda Davies (Krane and Davies 2002, 2007), which provides an interesting insight into practices in refuges in Canada. In a case study that involved a combination of participant observation and interviews with five workers and twelve women in one refuge, Krane and Davies (2002) argue that there are difficulties with the dominant theoretical perspective adopted in refuges as 'issues of mothering are eclipsed by pervasive messages to separate from abusive partners and establish independent lives' (p. 176). This study showed that mothering had been largely taken for granted and had become invisible in this refuge:

Feminist intervention in the shelter centered on the emancipation of women from oppressive, violent relations. Although this goal is both understandable and admirable, failing to shape intervention to respond to women as mothers is to risk failing to end the violence in their lives. This practice begs the question of the place of mothering in rethinking feminist intervention in this arena. (p. 187)

Building on the findings of this first study, Krane and Davies (2007) conducted another case study, which involved both participant observation and interviews with eleven workers in one refuge. The findings of this second study suggested that mothering had remained largely invisible, but

When women, in their capacities as mothers, are rendered visible in a shelter, we contend their interactions with their children are understood through a lens of heightened sensitivity to abusive relationships that are marked by the unacceptable use of power and control. (Krane and Davies 2007, p. 24)

The authors argue that this lens is distorted and that 'an analysis of gender-based power and control that is used to understand men's violence against women is problematic when it is transposed to mother-child relations' (p. 35) and that practices with women and children who have experienced domestic violence require a better understanding of the complexities and challenges of everyday mothering.

In the statutory sector, there is no organisation specialising in domestic violence. Nonetheless, the literature in the field of domestic violence has highlighted the significance of a range of services in the experiences of women who have experienced violence, including health and mental health services (Williamson 2000; Davidson *et al.* 2001; Humphreys and Thiara 2003b), substance abuse services (Humphreys *et al.* 2005), housing (Hague and Malos 1993, 1994; Levison and Harwin 2001), the police (Hanmer and Griffiths 2001) and the Crown Prosecution Service (Edwards 2001). The overall picture that emerges from the

literature suggests that there has been limited recognition and acknowledgement of the extent and consequences of domestic violence, let alone children's exposure to domestic violence or mothering in this context. Nonetheless, Humphreys and Stanley (2006) claim that due to the development of multi-agency work, 'the growth of awareness of domestic violence among those working for statutory agencies heralds the first stage in "mainstreaming" the issue' (p. 10).

The scope of this review of the literature does not allow space to focus on all the areas identified above. However, when considering issues of domestic violence, children's exposure to violence and mothering, it appears important to consider policies and practices around issues of child protection and around issues of residence and contact following parental separation, as they have raised particular concerns amongst activists and scholars in the field of domestic violence. In Britain, the Children Act 1989 aims at providing a unified legal framework across public and private law. Although the Children Act 1989 and the initial accompanying guidance make no reference to the issue of domestic violence (Hester and Radford 1996a; Harrison 2006), there has been some recognition of the problem of domestic violence since its implementation, particularly in relation to child protection (Humphreys and Stanley 2006; Rivett and Kelly 2006). For instance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health 1999), which sets out the parameters for local authority inter-agency procedures, acknowledges that the 'prolonged and/or regular exposure to domestic violence can have a serious impact on a child's development and emotional well-being, despite the best efforts of the victim parent to protect the child' (Department of Health 1999, p. 9). This guidance also states that 'both the physical assaults and psychological abuse suffered by adult victims who experience domestic violence can have a negative impact on their

ability to look after their children' (p. 9). More recently, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 extended the definition of harm set out in the Children Act 1989 to include the 'impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another', which has the potential to make cases of domestic violence more explicit within child protection.

This begs the question of whether or not a child's exposure to domestic violence should be considered as a form of child abuse and as a child protection matter. Based on a review of the literature that was produced before the developments presented above, Carroll (1994) argues that many children who live with domestic violence 'fulfil the criteria outlined in the legislation, of an impairment of their emotional and social development which amounts to "significant harm"' (p. 11) and that the 'response by child protection agencies to other areas of child abuse offers a model which can readily be adapted to meet the needs of children who live in violent families' (p. 12). In contrast, Edleson (2004) proposes an argument against assuming that child's exposure to domestic violence is automatically a form of child abuse. He argues that

within the groups of exposed children, many do not exhibit problems and do not themselves become victims of child abuse. We do not yet know which children are safe and recover quickly once in a safe environment and which may develop short or long-term problems. (p. 17)

He also argues that it is important to recognise the practical reality of both resources and practices, which ultimately may not be able to provide these families with adequate support. Moreover, Jaffe and his colleagues (Jaffe *et al.* 2003) stress that phrases such as 'witnessing domestic violence is child abuse' need to be regarded with caution, because they tend to obscure the complex relationship between children's exposure to domestic violence and the abuse of women, as well

as men's responsibility for the violence. Furthermore, an automatic assumption of child abuse may discourage abused women from reaching out for support, namely because of fear of having their children removed from their care (see DeVoe and Smith 2003).

In terms of child protection practice, there has been a slow and uneven recognition of the problem of domestic violence (Maynard 1985; Farmer and Owen 1995; Mullender 1996; Stanley 1997). In a qualitative study that involved a documentary analysis of the child protection case files for 32 families where domestic violence had been identified and interviews with five social workers, Humphreys (1999; see also Humphreys 2000) identified two general patterns in practice with these families. The first of these patterns was one of avoidance and minimisation of the issue of domestic violence. This could happen through not mentioning domestic violence as an issue to be considered, reporting it as 'fighting' or 'marital conflict', naming the women's violence as equivalent or more important than the men's violence, and naming other issues as the problem and focusing on these issues rather than on the men's violence. The findings of this study demonstrated that in seven out of the 32 cases, the focus had been on the women's abuse of alcohol or drugs; in six of these cases the children had been registered under the category 'child neglect' and domestic violence had been made invisible. In contrast, the second pattern suggested a marked trend towards naming domestic violence more directly. The findings show that domestic violence was more likely to become a central issue in situations where a child had been hurt or a woman seriously physically injured. Whilst these women and children were provided with varying degrees of support, the most serious intervention strategies had been used,

including the removal of children. Although Humphreys (1999) did not interview the women themselves, she proposes that

For women in these situations who were already the subject of violence themselves, such strictures must be experienced as punitive, particularly when they are not followed through with effective strategies from police, the legal system and services within the interagency forum to assist her with this difficult and often dangerous task. (p. 83)

Finally, Humphreys (1999) points out that several social workers expressed concerns about their inability to effectively tackle these issues, but they also considered that the paramouncy of the child had justified such a 'strong line' being taken.

In her work on domestic violence and the social work and probation response, Mullender (1996) reviews the existing literature and depicts a picture of inconsistency. She argues that 'neither probation officers nor social workers have routinely re-examined their workloads to consider how they might use their role and influence to hold abusive men to account for their actions in other ways or – crucially – to help women achieve safety and a greater possibility of caring for their children as they would wish' (p. 6). She further identifies a range of problems in social work practices with women who have experienced domestic violence, which include being interested only in children, ignoring women as persons in their own right, blaming women and failing to provide them with effective help.

In North America, studies have documented situations where children were exposed to domestic violence, and women faced accusations of 'neglect' for 'failure to protect' (Edleson 1998; Magen 1999; Lavergne *et al.* 2001b; Kopels and Sheridan 2002; Kantor and Little 2003). In these cases, the 'parenting standard implicit in the laws defining witnessing domestic violence as child neglect is that

children should not see or hear the abuse of their mothers' (Magen 1999, p. 128). Although practitioners may be sympathetic to situations in which women are victims of their partners' violence, this is secondary to the view that the protection and safety of children must be considered paramount (Magen 1999; Kopels and Sheridan 2002). The problems with the concept 'failure to protect' is that it places the focus on women and the term 'failure' implies circumstances that are controllable – that present the opportunity not to fail:

In the context of domestic violence, this suggests that the failure was due to the mother not taking some action that would have protected her children. However, domestic violence is unlike other acts of omission ... because the probability for a successful outcome – protecting the children from witnessing further abuse – may be relatively low. (Magen 1999, p. 128)

Magen (1999) argues that for women to avoid allegations of failure to protect, they need to take actions against the perpetrators – the onus to control and predict the abuse is placed on the victim rather than the perpetrator – and 'not only should a battered women take action to stop the battering, but ... this action should be successful' (p. 132).

Overall, it appears that the developments in relation to domestic violence in child protection policies and practices have been mainly influenced by the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence, which focuses on the consequences for children of being exposed to domestic violence, considers women only in relation to their children and proposes a deficit model of mothering (see Carroll 1994; Brandon and Lewis 1996).

In contrast, the issue of domestic violence has remained largely unacknowledged in policies and practices in relation to residence and contact following parental separation. In fact, Hester and Radford (1996a) argue that the Children Act 1989

undermines the legislation that seeks to protect women, due to the pro-contact philosophy that has prevailed in private law. Hester and Radford (1996b) conducted a qualitative study on domestic violence and child contact arrangements in England and Denmark, and the findings for England – which were based on interviews with 77 professionals and advisors, 53 women and two children – revealed that the professionals who had been involved in contact cases had rarely challenged the men's use of violence and that the value of contact had generally not been questioned in the light of the violence. Furthermore, there appears to be an assumption that 'if parents agree then arrangements made will work' (Hester and Radford 1996b, p.20), so that the focus is placed upon women's agreement – or otherwise 'hostility' – to contact. In this regard, Hester and Radford (1996b) point out that

Workable 'agreements' are unlikely to result from face-to-face negotiations where there has been domestic violence. This emphasis upon agreement rather than outcome meant that many women on the study 'agreed' to contact arrangements which were clearly unworkable. (p. 20)

Consequently, resources to protect women from further violence as a result of contact arrangements were extremely limited and the abuse of women and children in these circumstances were common. For instance, 22 out of the 31 women whose children had contact with their fathers had recently been abused by their ex-partners and only five women claimed that their contact arrangements 'worked'.

More recently, a survey conducted with refuges and domestic violence services across England and Wales revealed that only three per cent of the 178 respondents thought that appropriate safety measures were taken in most cases in relation to contact arrangements (Saunders 2004). Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents thought that such measures were taken in some but not all cases. The main

concerns that were raised by the respondents related to the pro-contact culture in the courts, the fact that court professionals sometimes fail to recognise the risks associated with domestic violence and the shortage of resources for contact to be supervised. In the same vein, a multi-methodological study on contact centres in two jurisdictions demonstrated that there is confusion amongst referrers and centre staff regarding the level of vigilance associated with supported and supervised contact and that several centres lacked the basic practical features on which safety depends (Aris *et al.* 2002). The findings of this study showed that practices that are known to promote safety – including information sharing, screening and safety assessments – were not routinely undertaken, even when domestic violence had been identified.

There is therefore a contradiction between public and private law in terms of dealing with domestic violence. Indeed, Harrison (2006) points out that the pro-contact philosophy that has underpinned policies and practices in private law displaces child protection. Radford and Hester (2006) also address this contradiction in their recent work on mothering and domestic violence:

A major problem faced by practitioners working with mothers and children experiencing domestic violence is that they are presented with a set of quite different, separate and indeed contradictory ideas and practice approaches in relation to 'domestic violence', 'child protection' and 'child contact' respectively. Mothers and fathers end up construed quite differently in relation to 'safe parenting' and mother blaming is the outcome. (p. 140)

Radford and Hester (2006) suggest that 'the professional approaches to domestic violence, child protection and visitation and contact are so different that they may be conceived as belonging to different planets... [and] the three planets each have their own history, culture and law' (p. 142). On the 'domestic violence planet', men's behaviours are recognised as being abusive and they can be prosecuted for a

criminal offence. Women and children are seen as being in need of protection. On the 'child protection planet', men's behaviours may still be recognised as being abusive, but the focus is on the protection of children – not adults. It is unlikely that men will be prosecuted, because of the welfare rather than criminalising approach that has prevailed in this area. Women are seen as responsible for dealing with the consequences of their partners' violence. Finally, on the 'visitation and contact planet' the emphasis is less on the protection of children than on children having two parents, and abusive men are likely to be defined as 'good enough fathers' and to be granted contact with their children – if not residence. The authors argue that this has implications for women's mothering:

She [the mother] has attempted to curb his violent behaviour by calling the police and supporting his prosecution on Planet A. She has left her violent partner following instruction from social services on Planet B that she leave in order to protect her children. However, Planet C in effect has the opposite approach – that families should continue to be families even if there is divorce and separation. On Planet C, she is therefore ordered to allow contact between her violent partner and the children, leaving her not only bewildered and confused but also yet again scared for the safety of her children. (p. 143)

Overall, these inconsistencies and inadequacies are likely to discourage abused women from reaching out for support. For instance a study of health visiting that involved interviews with seventeen women who had experienced domestic violence revealed that all these women reported difficulties in seeking help and that these difficulties were influenced by fear for their safety, lack of knowledge regarding appropriate sources of support and protection, and concerns about losing custody of their children (Peckover 2003). Similar findings were reported in a qualitative study conducted in the United States that involved focus groups with a total of 43 women who had experienced domestic violence (DeVoe and Smith 2003). Although the women reported positive experiences with individual services providers, they

primarily reported negative experiences in regard to their help-seeking efforts. First, few women reported that they had been able to identify services with appropriate expertise to support them and their children. Moreover, several women reported that they had not sought help because of their mistrust of the system. The findings showed that 'the fear of being charged with neglect or failure to protect and the threat of losing custody of their children caused many victims of domestic violence to delay or avoid altogether seeking help or protective services for themselves or their children' (DeVoe and Smith 2003, p. 287). Finally, the women talked about having felt punished or blamed when they had tried to obtain assistance for their children; namely having their children removed from their custody. DeVoe and Smith (2003) conclude that

In essence, system responses exacerbated women's distrust of and appeared to promote an underutilization of available services, particularly those services related to assistance with parenting and child well-being. Even if actual system responses begin to change to become more supportive of preserving the mother-child unit, battered women's perceptions of negative consequences for reporting domestic violence may remain a significant barrier to seeking help for themselves or their children. (p. 290)

CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the extent and the consequences of the problem of domestic violence and has argued for the adoption of a radical feminist framework, which places the issues of gender and power at the centre of the analysis and links domestic violence to other forms of men's violence in order to reveal the broader context of male domination (Bograd 1988; Mullender 1996). Despite a clear focus on women, radical feminist activists and scholars in this field have raised concerns regarding the situation of children, particularly in terms of the interconnectedness of

violence against women and children within the family (Bowker *et al.* 1988; Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Kelly 1994).

In the early 1990s, a large consensus emerged amongst scholars regarding the fact that too little attention had been paid to the situation of children living with domestic violence (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled 1993; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995a) and this has led to the development of an impressive empirical and theoretical literature on the issue of children's exposure to domestic violence.

Although a notable element of this work has drawn upon the legacies of radical feminism (Mullender and Morley 1994a; McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002), the bulk of the work has developed within what can be seen as child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence, which has been primarily concerned with establishing the ways in which exposure to domestic violence impacts on children and which has been underpinned by psychological and developmental approaches (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Carroll 1994; Peled *et al.* 1995a; Holden *et al.* 1998a; Geffner *et al.* 2000; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001; Jaffe *et al.* 2004). In addition, the post-modern critique has recently attracted interest in the field of domestic violence and has raised different concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence (Featherstone and Trinder 1997; Davies and Krane 2003; Wexler 2006).

Little work in the field of domestic violence has focused on mothering in this context. Not surprisingly, concerns regarding women's mothering have generally been raised alongside concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence and it has been possible to identify two main trends in the ways the issue of mothering has been considered and has influenced policies and practices. On

the one hand, the work of radical feminist scholars on domestic violence (Stark and Filtcraft 1988; Kelly 1994; Radford and Hester 2006) and on children's exposure to domestic violence (McGee 2002; Mullender *et al.* 2002) has highlighted the importance of exploring women's experiences of mothering in this context. This work has also emphasised the link between mothering and women's oppression in the context of patriarchy, and the generally shared interests of women and children in the context of domestic violence. On the other hand, the scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence has mainly considered mothering as being determining factor in the protection of children and in how children are affected by their exposure to domestic violence (Holden 1998; Holden *et al.* 1998b; Edleson 1999a; Fortin *et al.* 2000; Jaffe and Crooks 2005). However, the child-centred and gender-neutral approach that has underpinned this work has meant that women have been relegated to the periphery – to be solely considered in relation to their children – and that mothering has often been conceptualised in terms of 'parenting' (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000). This work has presented a deficit model of mothering, which focuses on women's 'failures' as mothers and tends to pathologise women's mothering. At the margins from these two trends, the work that has been influenced by the post-modern critique in the field of domestic violence has emphasised the need to problematise the relationships between women and children and has put forward concepts such as maternal subjectivity and maternal ambivalence (Featherstone and Trinder 1997; Wexler 2006); to this date, this work appears to have had little influence on policies and practices.

This examination of the literature also reveals that mother-blaming has emerged as an important theme in the field of domestic violence – either implicitly or explicitly. Whilst a number of feminist activists and scholars have questioned the tendency to

blame abused women in regard to their mothering (Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Radford and Hester 2006), it appears that much of the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence has tended to reproduce mother-blaming through the adoption of a deficit model of mothering. There is also evidence to suggest that this tendency has permeated contemporary policies and practices, particularly in the statutory sector (see discussion in Mullender 1996; Hester and Radford 1996a, 1996b; Humphreys 1999, 2000; Radford and Hester 2001, 2006).

In sum, the critical evaluation of the literature that has been presented in this chapter emphasises the need for more theoretical and empirical work on mothering in the context of domestic violence; this work should be located within a research agenda that builds on women's experiences and efforts in order to overcome mother-blaming (see Radford and Hester 2001). In order to develop a better understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence and really to challenge mother-blaming, it is also necessary to engage more fully with the feminist literature in the field of mothering, which is the aim of the next chapter.

**CHAPTER THREE ENGAGING WITH THE FEMINIST LITERATURE ON MOTHERING –
THEORISING MOTHER-BLAMING**

Whenever we hear the charge of bad mothering, we need to pause to consider what is going on. What are the social and historical conditions shaping mothers' lives? What are the ideologies and cultural assumptions shaping public perceptions of them? And most important of all, what is at stake, and for whom, in their social construction of bad mothers? (Chase and Rogers 2001, p. 47)

After all, in a child-centred society, what could be more reprehensible than an apparent neglect of children's supposed needs? (Oakley 1974, p. 203)

The critical evaluation of the literature on domestic violence that was presented in the previous chapter revealed that mother-blaming has emerged as a significant theme in this field. Indeed, whilst a number of feminist activists and scholars have questioned the tendency to blame abused women in regard to their mothering (Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Radford and Hester 2006), it appears that most of the work on children's exposure to domestic violence has tended to reproduce mother-blaming through the adoption of a deficit model of mothering. This tendency appears to have also permeated a range of contemporary policies and practices (see discussion in Mullender 1996; Hester and Radford 1996a, 1996b; Humphreys 1999, 2000; Radford and Hester 2001, 2006). The previous chapter also argued that in order to develop a better understanding of mothering in the specific context of domestic violence and to challenge related mother-blaming, it is necessary to engage more fully with the feminist literature in the field of mothering.

This chapter therefore engages with the feminist literature on mothering, by applying a closer focus to the issue of mother-blaming. Mother-blaming can be conceptualised as the processes through which women become seen as 'bad'

mothers, and it has been seen as a pervasive problem that carries important implications for women and their mothering (Caplan 1989; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998; Weingarten *et al.* 1998). Indeed, Weingarten and her colleagues (Weingarten *et al.* 1998) stress that

For most mothers it is impossible to escape the ubiquitous idea that some mothers are 'good', others 'bad', and that some mothering practices are 'right' and others 'wrong'. These ideas pervade our lives. Texts, images, interpersonal interactions, codes, and laws, all drench us in messages about what constitutes good and bad mothering and who the good and the bad mothers are. (p. 1)

In fact, ideas of 'good' and 'bad' mothering are interconnected and constitute fundamental aspects of what has been defined by feminist activists and scholars as the institution of motherhood, a patriarchal institution that constrains, regulates and dominates women and their mothering (Rich 1976; O'Reilly 2004). In a recent account, Chase and Rogers (2001) suggest that 'to think of motherhood as an institution ... is to focus on a society's specific mechanisms for shaping what mothers do and how they feel about what they do, as well as others' treatment and expectations of mothers' (p. 60). These 'mechanisms' are not a natural phenomenon – though motherhood does present itself as the natural outcome of women's biology and reproduction, which enables it to remain powerful and largely unchallenged (Glenn 1994; Smart 1996; Chase and Rogers 2001). As pointed out by O'Reilly (2004),

Motherhood is primarily *not* a natural or biological function; rather, it is specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors. As a cultural construction, its meaning varies with time and place; there is no essential or universal experience of motherhood. (p. 4, italics in the original)

In contemporary western societies, motherhood continues to have a 'mythological, mysterious and powerful status' (Nicolson 1997, p. 375), which affects the lives of all women – including those who do not have children (Woollett 1991; May 1998). It ensures that women perform the work involved in mothering in particular ways, which are not defined by women themselves. In this regard, Fineman (1995) argues that motherhood 'has always been, and continues to be, a colonized concept – an event physically practiced and experienced by women but occupied, defined, and given content and value by the core concepts of patriarchal ideology' (p. 217).

This chapter is concerned with the processes through which mother-blaming arises out of the institution of motherhood and of its dominant construction of 'good' mothering. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on two interconnected elements that are at the centre of the dominant construction of 'good' mothering and that also provide the impetus for mother-blaming, i.e. women's actions and children's needs. The second section considers the importance of the context in which mothering takes place and of women's social locations in the processes of mother-blaming. The last section addresses the ways in which women both integrate and resist mother-blaming.

THE IMPETUS FOR MOTHER-BLAMING: WOMEN'S ACTIONS AND CHILDREN'S NEEDS

It is mothers that are held responsible for the ills and woes of children that lead them to being unhappy, unhealthy, violent, criminal or irresponsible adolescents and adults. (Allan 2004, p. 58)

As mentioned above, the meaning of motherhood varies with time and place (O'Reilly 2004), and the definition of 'good' mothering is often implicit rather than

explicit (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a). Nonetheless, an enduring feature of the institution of motherhood is the positioning of women as responsible for their children (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Richardson 1993; Nicolson 1997). Women who have children seem to have little choice but to perform the work involved in mothering (Richardson 1993; Fox 1998) and women remain the primary carers for children (Kurz 1997; Charles 2002). In this regard, the findings of a qualitative study conducted in Canada that involved 40 women and their male partners suggest that

Women have virtually no choice about accepting responsibility for their babies, however that is defined ... Fathers, however, have *choice* about how actively they will be involved in their babies' care. While women's identity may depend on fulfilling the duties of motherhood, fathers are beyond the grasp of ideologies of 'intensive mothering'. (Fox 1998, p. 165, italics in the original)

According to Oakley (1974), the institution of motherhood rests on three main assumptions. The first and second assumptions are that all women need to be mothers and that all mothers need their children. The third assumption – which is 'the most subversive part of the myth of motherhood' (Oakley 1974, p. 203) – is that all children need their mothers, which rests upon three further ideas: children need their biological mothers; children need mothers rather than any other caretaker; and children need to be raised in the context of a one-to-one relationship.

In addition, women have to perform the work involved in mothering in particular ways for them to be perceived as being 'good' mothers. In her influential work on mothering in the United States, Sharon Hays (1996) proposes the concept of 'intensive' mothering:

The model of intensive mothering tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and that it should be centered on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labor-intensive, and costly. This, we are told, is the

best model, largely because it is what children need and deserve. (Hays 1996, p. 21)

The idea of 'good' mothering is thus concerned with women's actions as mothers, and these actions should be centred on the needs of their children; women should always prioritise the needs of their children, and even subordinate their own needs to those of their children (Wearing 1984). In this regard, Chase and Rogers (2001) point out that

Above all, she [the 'good' mother] is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally yet she is careful not to smother them with her love and her own needs. (p. 30)

Whilst women have been given full responsibility for their children, they have not been perceived as being qualified to assess the needs of children. Instead, notions of children's needs and 'good' mothering have been largely defined by 'experts', and there has been a 'professionalisation' of motherhood (Marshall 1991; Phoenix and Woollett 1991b). According to Nicolson (1997), 'social prescriptions for contemporary motherhood are constantly offered, reinforced and embellished by "experts" with recourse to "science", and their versions of what constitutes good mothering practice is the socially received "wisdom"' (p. 378).

Although the concept of children's needs also varies with time and place (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994), it generally refers to much more than the children's 'basic' or physiological needs, such as being sheltered, fed, clothed and clean (Hays 1996). For instance, the data from a qualitative study conducted in Australia at the end of the 1970s that involved 150 women revealed that a 'good' mother was seen as caring for her children's physical needs by providing them with food and clothing and by keeping them neat and

clean (Wearing 1984). In addition, a 'good' mother was seen as caring for her children's emotional needs by showing them love, being always available for them, giving them time and attention, listening to them and guiding them when necessary (Wearing 1984).

The work of 'experts' who have drawn upon psychological and developmental approaches has been extremely influential in terms of defining and assessing children's needs, and this work has been particularly concerned with children's emotional needs and with the quality of their 'attachment' to their mothers (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Richardson 1993; Burman 1994; Birns 1999). In this work, women's attitudes and actions in relation to their children have been seen as the main determining factors in their children's development; women's 'sensitivity' has been seen as a particularly important element (Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994; Birns 1999). According to Woollett and Phoenix (1991),

The picture of good mothering which emerges from observational studies is of the mother who provides a stimulating and sensitive environment. Sensitivity takes many forms but involves an awareness of children's behaviour, a reasonably accurate interpretation of their behaviour, as well as prompt and appropriate responses. Sensitive mothering is done explicitly through activities such as reading to children or engaging them in conversations and 'incidentally' as part of the everyday business of shopping, food preparation and housework. (p. 35)

In this work, the term 'bonding' has also been used to refer to women's emotional ties to their children (Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994), and 'because motherhood is seen almost entirely as instinctual, it is considered natural for mothers to love and "bond" with their infants and such emotions are viewed as the central core of women's experiences of motherhood' (Woollett and Phoenix, p. 41). In the same vein, the concept of 'maternal instinct' refers to the idea that all women

have a biological drive towards conceiving and bearing children, that this is a precursor to the drive to nurture those children, and that the skills required to care for children emerge or evolve immediately after the birth without the need for training (Nicolson 1997; see also Badinter 1980). As noted by Woollett and Phoenix (1991), this work has been so influential that 'many of these assumptions about how women should mother have passed into general use and are included in professional advice to mothers' (p. 49).

Overall, the idea of 'good' mothering is about what women should do in order to meet the needs of their children, and women are therefore blamed when they do not act accordingly. Whilst the psychological and developmental work presented above has ostensibly been centred on the needs of children, the focus has been on women's actions; 'it is the adequacy of mothering that developmental psychology is called upon to regulate and legislate upon' (Burman 1994, p. 3).

Given the vastness of the task and the high standards that have been attached to the dominant construction of 'good' mothering, it appears that 'no mother can *always* be a good mother by her own or others' standards, and therefore all mothers are inevitably marginalized by this oppressive idea' (Weingarten *et al.* 1998, p. 7, italics in the original). Nicolson (1997) also argues that 'the romanticised and idealised woman, full of love, forgiveness and selflessness, does not and cannot exist' (p. 371) and that 'all mothers are destined to disappoint their children and themselves' (p. 377). These statements were supported by the findings of a qualitative study on mothering that was conducted in Australia, which demonstrated that eighteen out of the twenty women who were involved in the research – who were recruited through a women's email network – provided a distinct discourse

around mother-blaming, despite the fact that no question focused specifically on this issue (Jackson and Mannix 2004). These women reported that blame had been associated with their mothering from their earliest days as mothers and persisted in varying degrees throughout the years, and mother-blaming had been experienced by them as a burden that had primarily been placed upon them by others.

The tendency towards mother-blaming has been marked in relation to the issue of 'child neglect', which tends to implicate both the idea of children's needs and women's actions in their 'role' as mothers (Swift 1995, 1998; Scourfield 2000; Turney 2000; Scourfield 2003). In her work with the evocative title *Manufacturing 'Bad Mothers': A Critical Perspective on Child Neglect*, Karen Swift (1995) suggests that the study of 'child neglect' is in fact the study of women who 'fail' as mothers:

While the category neglect appears on the surface to be gender free, implicating 'parents' as responsible for the care for children, virtually all people actually accused of neglecting their children, both historically and at present, are mothers. (p. 101)

In the same vein, Turney (2000) argues that

Neglect seems in part to involve an absence of care or nurture, and these concepts are definitely not gender-neutral. Ideas of both care and nurture are strongly identified with the feminine in Western culture and philosophy ... Is neglect an absence of (female) care – or putting it more bluntly, is neglect something that specifically *mothers* do (or don't do)? (p. 49, italics in the original)

Furthermore, all aspects of women's lives come under scrutiny when they become mothers, and women can be labelled as 'bad' or 'neglectful' mothers on the basis of any of their actions – whether or not they can be demonstrated to have a clear effect on their children. For instance, Appell (1998) examines the situation of four women whose children had been placed into public care, and she argues that

'although each of the four mothers had problems, those problems were at best tenuously connected to the harm their children suffered or risked suffering' (p. 376).

More generally, she suggests that

They are the mothers of the roughly half million children in foster care in the United States. Courts have removed their children from their homes because their mothers have failed to meet someone's standards of proper mothering. A small minority of bad mothers have physically harmed or intentionally abandoned their children. The rest are guilty of less serious offences: they use illegal drugs, consume too much alcohol, are abused by husbands or boyfriends, allow their children to be abused by husbands or boyfriends, or leave their children with family or friends without making a 'proper' care plan. In the eyes of the world, when it is looking, all of these mothers are the same. They are reviled and dehumanized, and their children must be saved from them. (p. 356)

In the same vein, Baker and Carson (1999) point out that 'any substance-abusing woman is inevitably a "bad" mother, for it is assumed that the search for, and the use of, substances makes her inattentive, self-indulgent, and negligent rather [than] exclusively mindful of her children's needs' (p. 349). However, the findings of their qualitative study that involved participant observation and 17 interviews in a residential substance-abuse treatment programme showed that the women avoided the claim that they were 'bad' mothers by asserting that they cared for and were deeply committed to their children. The authors conclude that whilst 'there is little dispute that parental substance abuse can have negative effects on children ... what can be disputed is that drug-addicted mothers are always bad parents' (p. 360).

The extent to which women's actions have met the needs of their children can be 'measured' in different ways. First, the work on 'child neglect' suggests that 'dirty children' and 'untidy houses' have been seen as indicators of women's 'failures' in meeting their children's needs (Swift 1995; Scourfield 2000, 2003). Children's

development and behaviours have also been conceptualised as visible and tangible 'measures' of the quality of women's mothering. In fact, most problems have been routinely attributed to 'inadequate' or 'bad' mothering in children's early lives:

The dutiful, indulgent mother provides a secure environment in which the child learns the control and regulation of emotions. But separation, lack of bonding or emotional disturbance on the part of the mother would give rise to criminality and pathology. (Burman 1994, p. 80)

Based on analysis of all the 125 articles that had been published in nine journals during the years 1970, 1976 and 1982, and that had discussed the etiology of emotional problems, Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1985) reveal that a total of 72 different kinds of 'psychopathology' have been attributed to women as mothers, including behaviour problems, aggressiveness, depression, phobias, schizophrenia and suicidal behaviours. Only two per cent of the articles had not mentioned the mother and no article had described the mother's relationship with the child solely in positive terms. The child's 'pathology' has been attributed – at least in part – to the mother's activities in 82 per cent of the articles and to the mother's inactivity in 43 per cent of the articles. In contrast, the child's 'pathology' had been attributed to the father's activities in 43 per cent of the articles and to the father's inactivity in 39 per cent of the articles. More recently, Allan (2004) conducted 36 interviews with women and men who had provided therapeutic intervention to children who had sexually assaulted another child, which revealed that 'deviance' was thought to be learnt from the child's environment, specifically the family and the children's mothers. Indeed, women were blamed not only for failing to address the child's behaviours appropriately, but also for causing the child to become sexually violent. It is generally women's 'success' or 'failure' in establishing a 'strong' bond with their children that is perceived as responsible for the absence or presence of problems

(Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994).

According to Birns (1999),

That every child, as for that matter all of us, thrive on feelings of warmth, love and respect is undoubtedly true. But to think that this depends on mothers and mothers only, or that it all happens in infancy is an extraordinary oversimplification. To attribute the healthy development of children exclusively to the care that mothers provide is to ignore the complexity of the world of infants and children. (p. 19)

THE CONTEXT FOR MOTHERING AND WOMEN'S SOCIAL LOCATIONS

Although the good mother ideal is depicted in terms of what she does, it embodies certain unspoken assumptions about who she is. (Chase and Rogers 2001, p. 31)

The previous section highlighted the general concern for children to be brought up in the 'right circumstances' and to 'turn out right' (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a). In this regard, the context for child development has generally been equated with women and their mothering (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Burman 1994) and little attention has been given to the context in which mothering takes place, despite the fact that women who mother in different social circumstances may have different experiences of mothering (Phoenix and Wollett 1991b).

Moreover, it appears that when the context in which mothering takes place is perceived as being dangerous or damaging for children, it is again women who are blamed. An illustration of this is the long-standing tradition of mother-blaming in situations where children have been sexually abused. In this context, women have routinely been seen as being responsible for the abuse, as 'failing to protect' their children and even as 'colluding' with the perpetrators (Hooper 1992; Davies and Krane 1996; Krane 2003). Based on the findings of a case study conducted in a

child welfare agency in Canada, Davies and Krane (1996) demonstrate that subtle forms of mother-blaming were reproduced in everyday practices with women whose children had been sexually abused. They point out that 'mother-blaming in the subtle form of an assumption that mother knew or should have known or colluded is problematic ... it is wrapped up with expectations of women, reflects an emphasis on mother's failure to protect over the offender's sexually abusive acts' (p. 15). This tendency to blame women for the context in which their mothering takes place often means that the focus is shifted away from the real problems – in this case men's violence – onto women's 'failures' as mothers.

Furthermore, the dominant model of 'good' mothering has derived from the situation of the European/American, white, middle-class women, and has been projected as universal (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Glenn 1994; Chase and Rogers 2001). Consequently, 'the existence of alternative beliefs and practices among racial, ethnic, and sexual minority communities as well as non-middle-class segments of society has gone unnoticed' (Glenn 1994, p. 2). Phoenix and Woollett (1991a) propose the concept of 'normalized absence/pathological presence' to make sense of the position of black and working-class women in the psychological and developmental theories presented above. This concept illustrates the fact that most studies of 'normal development' have tended not to involve black and working-class women, but these women have tended to be over-represented when the 'pathological' has been studied:

By failing to recognize such issues, current social constructions of normal motherhood do not reflect the realities of working class mothers' and children's lives, and this results in any differences between them and middle class mothers and children being seen as pathological or deviant. In a similar way black mothers and those from minority ethnic groups are socially constructed as 'others' and hence are viewed as deviating from 'good/normal'

mothering. Ironically, then, differences between mothers are glossed over where they have social significance and commonalities that do exist are obscured by the construction of the 'normal/deviant' couplet. (Phoenix and Woollett 1991a, p. 18)

Therefore, certain women are more likely to be blamed only on the basis of their social locations; this includes women from black and minority ethnic communities and working-class women, but also 'single mothers', 'lesbian mothers' and 'teenage mothers'. Chase and Rogers (2001) argue that 'despite significant differences among these women, a similar process of social construction vilifies them' (p. 31).

Overall, whilst the notion of 'good' mothering has been explicitly concerned with women's actions and children's needs, it appears that the context in which mothering takes place and women's social locations are also significant issues in the processes through which women become seen as 'bad' mothers.

TAKING THE BLAME OR RESISTING MOTHER-BLAMING?

The most poignant instances of mother-blaming within the family are those in which the mother blames herself for whatever goes wrong. Mothers of misbehaving kids blame themselves for 'not setting enough limits' if they are slightly less rigid disciplinarians than average, and if they are slightly more rigid, they blame themselves for 'coming down too hard' on the child. (Caplan 1998, p. 133)

Research evidence demonstrates that women often internalise mother-blaming attitudes and tend to blame themselves. Based on the findings from their study on mothering, Jackson and Mannix (2004) argue that 'it was evident that some women internalized the mother-blaming attitudes of those around them and blamed themselves for things that were often outside their control and that could not reasonably be linked to actions or omissions on their part' (p. 153). In the same vein, a recent American study that involved 39 women and 22 men who had a son

who had been diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder also demonstrated that the women spontaneously blame themselves when discussing their son's behaviours (Singh 2004).

In contrast, some women do actively resist mother-blaming. For instance, the study conducted by Baker and Carson (1999) with women in a residential substance-abuse treatment programme demonstrated that all the participants perceived themselves as 'good' mothers in some regards: 'according to the women, a substance-abusing mother can be a good mom as long as she takes care of her child(ren)'s practical needs, protect her children from harm, and copes with everyday life struggles without losing her temper (p. 357). In the same vein, Croghan and Miell (1998) drew upon fourteen interviews with women who had been the subject of current professional concerns about their mothering, and identified strategies that had been used by these women in dealing with mother-blaming. Croghan and Miell (1998) argue that 'in struggling to establish their own version of events, women who have been professionally defined as abusive engage with powerful discourses of motherhood and of normality which are likely to inform the nature of such definitions and the mothers' own interpretation and presentation of their experience' (p. 449). More specifically, the women had resisted the accusation of 'bad' mothering by positioning themselves within a framework of 'normal' mothering – by offering examples of 'exemplary' mothering and by the juxtaposition of features of 'good' and 'bad' mothering – and by emphasising the material and social circumstances in which their mothering had taken place. Alternatively, the women had accepted the designation of 'bad' mothering and either disputed professional definitions or attempted to work with the

professionals. The authors highlighted that the options were limited as they carried the risk of having their children removed from their custody and that

It would be unwarranted to interpret the refutation of the charge of 'bad mothering' as a sign that the women have no insight into their problems. Instead, this needs to be understood in the context of the risk associated with such an admission. (Croghan and Miell 1998, p. 402)

Overall, this suggests that whilst most women cannot escape the pervasive idea that some mothers are 'good' and others are 'bad', it is possible for women to actively resist mother-blaming (Weingarten *et al.* 1998). Again, the context in which mothering takes place and women's social locations are likely to influence the possibilities for women to resist mother-blaming.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has applied a closer focus to the issue of mother-blaming and has engaged with the feminist literature in the field of mothering, by locating the issue of mother-blaming as arising out of the patriarchal institution of motherhood. As pointed out by Pope and her colleagues (Pope *et al.* 1990),

The dissemination of the patriarchal ideology of mothering can be so powerful that the failure of lived experience to validate, or even correspond to, the story, far from exploring it, often produces either intensified efforts to achieve it or a destructive cycle of self- and/or mother blame. (p. 442)

Whilst mother-blaming is so pervasive that all women experience it (Nicolson 1997; Weingarten *et al.* 1998), there appear to be two main elements that provide the impetus for mother-blaming. The first of these elements refers to women's actions being seen as 'inappropriate'; this involves all aspects of their behaviours, whether or not they can be demonstrated to have a clear effect on their children. The

second element refers to the notion of children's needs and the assumption that children's appearance, development and behaviours are outcomes of the ways in which their needs have been met; it thus provides visible and tangible 'measures' of the quality of their mothering. In addition, the context in which mothering takes place and women's social locations are also important in the processes of mother-blaming, but this is generally not explicitly acknowledged.

Overall, the literature suggests that, as a context for mothering, domestic violence may exacerbate the likelihood for women to be blamed on the ground of their actions – for 'failing to protect', not caring for or 'neglecting' their children – and of their children's needs – based on their developmental or behavioural problems, either actual or potential.

It appears crucial to explore women's experiences in this specific context in order to develop a better understanding of the ways in which the institution of motherhood perpetuates its dominant construction of 'good' mothering, but also to identify ways to resist and overcome mother-blaming.

Feminist research involves recognizing that the knowledge we create, and the process of its creation, will always be contested, since it begins from theoretical assumptions and has intended practical implications about which there is unlikely to be a consensus. (Kelly *et al.* 1994, p. 46-47)

The general aim of the research that is reported here was to develop an understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence. While the theoretical assumptions that underpinned the research and its intended implications were introduced and discussed previously, this chapter focuses on the empirical aspect of the study and considers the ways in which the theoretical assumptions – which drew upon the legacies of radical feminism – translated into the epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects of the project. In the 1990s, feminist scholars started to question and challenge what had been seen as the 'orthodoxies' in feminist research (Kelly *et al.* 1994; Maynard 1994; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002), leading to the conclusion that there is no mode of enquiry or research method proper to feminist research. What makes research 'feminist' is not the methods that are used by the researchers, but 'the framework within which they are located, and the particular ways in which they are deployed' (Kelly *et al.*, 1994, p. 46). According to Kelly and her colleagues (Kelly *et al.* 1994),

Feminism for us is both a theory and practice, a framework which informs our lives. Its purpose is to understand women's oppression in order that we might end it. Our position as feminist researchers, therefore, is one in which we are part of the process of discovery and understanding and also responsible for attempting to enable change. (p. 28)

The study that is reported in this thesis was located within a framework – and was conducted in ways – that would generally mean that it is seen as ‘feminist’ research, but my position as a male researcher led me to adopt the term ‘pro-feminist’ study (see Chapter One). The use of this term makes explicit the theoretical assumptions that underpinned the research and its intended implications while, at the same time, acknowledging my particular position as a male researcher. In regard to feminist research, Kelly and her colleagues (Kelly *et al.* 1994) argue that feminist researchers use their ‘experiences of living as women as a starting point from which to build explanatory frameworks which would inform activism’ (p. 28); as a pro-feminist male researcher, I used my commitment to feminism and the experiences of women as a starting point.

Because we, as feminist or pro-feminist researchers, are part of the process of discovery and understanding (Kelly *et al.* 1994), the issue of reflexivity is addressed throughout the chapter. Whilst my position as a pro-feminist male researcher was discussed previously (see Chapter One), Doucet and Mauthner (2002) argue that the concept of reflexivity should be defined not only in terms of a researcher’s social position, but should also encompass ‘the personal, interpersonal, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research’ (p. 125). All these elements are discussed in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section addresses the epistemological underpinnings of this research project and revisits the research questions that were introduced at the beginning of the thesis (see Chapter One). The second section presents the methodological approach developed in the research – a qualitative and participative methodology. The third section focuses on

the phase of planning and entering the field, including the ethical and practical considerations, the participation criteria and the negotiation of access. The fourth section introduces the women who participated in this study and the following two sections focus on the fieldwork, i.e. the phases of initiating a critical discussion with women and exploring women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Finally, the seventh section considers the preparation, analysis and interpretation of the data.

As Miller and Bell (2002) point out, 'the course of a project may only be guessed at initially' (p. 54). In this sense, this chapter does not pretend that the empirical aspect of the research involved a linear or straightforward process; instead, it attempts to represent the dynamic process involved in conducting this project.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: TOWARDS A FEMINIST STANDPOINT

The theoretical approach that underpinned this research was presented in Chapter One. This approach was based upon the legacies of radical feminism and it was argued that it is possible to take into account some of the most helpful insights that have been proposed in the recent theoretical developments that have taken place within feminism, while at the same time retaining a commitment to some of the earlier tenets of second-wave feminism that have recently been challenged; this is essential if we are committed to producing useful research. In this regard, Maynard (1995) stresses the importance of the following four issues: tempering the tendency completely to decentre the self; reasserting the significance of the category 'woman'; counteracting the shift of focus from materiality to culture, language and representation; and establishing a distinction between universalisation and

generalisation. These issues have implications at an epistemological level and are congruent with the epistemological stance presented in this section.

This study aimed at developing an understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence by drawing upon the experiences of women and taking into account the forces that maintain the subordination of women (see Frye 1983). In this sense, the project can be seen as contributing to the development of a feminist standpoint on mothering in the context of domestic violence. The development of a feminist standpoint is rooted in the recognition of the existence of women's oppression in the context of male domination and in a commitment to struggle against it. In her work on radical feminism, Thompson (2001) argues that

The question is: *why* are women and their concerns problematic? It is the answer to that question – because of male supremacy – which constitutes the revolutionary potential and actuality of feminism. A feminist standpoint is grounded first and foremost in acknowledging the existence of male domination in order to challenge and oppose it. (p. 18, italics in the original)

The connection between women's experiences and the development of a feminist standpoint is neither automatic nor unproblematic. Indeed, women's experiences do not take place outside the realm of male domination and are influenced by patriarchal ideologies and structures (Thompson 2001). Moreover, women's experiences cannot be equated with feminist politics, 'as if critical awareness and understanding are inscribed on a person through forms of oppression' (Kelly *et al.* 1994, p. 29). For instance, it was clear throughout this project that not all the participants subscribed to a feminist understanding of mothering or domestic violence, despite their experiences.

The experiences of women are nonetheless central to the development of a feminist standpoint, and women – similarly to other oppressed groups – can see

different things or see certain things differently by virtue of their experiences.

Because the women who participated in this research had experienced mothering in the context of domestic violence, they were in a 'privileged' position. In this context, women's experiences are 'neither the passive reception of internal and external stimuli, nor the value-free perception of "what is", nor the mute acceptance of authorized versions of the world-taken-for-granted' (Thompson 2001, p. 49).

These experiences provide contextualised accounts, which need to be understood within the specific context in which they are produced as well as within the broader context of women's oppression and male domination. In turn, it is possible to recognise and discover general patterns of domination and oppression in the women's individual and collective experiences (Frye 1990), which contributes to the development of a better understanding of the patriarchal ideologies and structures in which these experiences take place.

This approach asserts the view that women's oppression and male domination can only be recognised from a position of willingness to see them. Therefore, there are strategic reasons for men not to contribute to the development of a feminist standpoint, as men benefit from the context of women's oppression and male domination (Thompson 2001). Nonetheless, such awareness is accessible to men and men are capable of understanding a feminist standpoint (Thompson 2001). If pro-feminist men are seen as 'those men who are sympathetic to the broad aims of feminist perspectives and recognize the systemic and historically enduring oppression of women' (Websdale 1998, p. 221), they are the ones who are most likely to be able to contribute to the development of a feminist standpoint.

Overall, this study can be seen as contributing to the development of a feminist standpoint on mothering in the context of domestic violence, and this epistemological stance was reflected in the research questions:

- What are the experiences of women in regard to their mothering in the context of domestic violence?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do these experiences of mothering reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood?
- How do women define positive support in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence?
- To what extent do women report the presence of positive support in their experiences, either from their informal social networks or from voluntary and statutory services?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do the women's experiences of contacts with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood?

A QUALITATIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE METHODOLOGY

The epistemological position and the research questions presented above consistently led to the development of a qualitative methodology. A qualitative methodology provides a space for women's 'voices' to be listened to and articulated, as opposed to the imposing of externally defined structures upon women's lives (Reinharz 1992; Maynard 1994; Skinner *et al.* 2005). This approach has the potential 'to enable silenced women to tell their own stories in their own voices' (Davis and Srinivasan 1994, p. 248) and to take into account – and account for – diversity amongst women. According to Davis and Srinivasan (1994), qualitative methodology has the potential to 'capture the contextual complexity of women's lives, to capture divergent perspectives among women' (p. 248).

The conceptualisation of women being in a 'privileged' position and my position as a male researcher with no direct experiences of mothering or domestic violence raised the need to involve women at different stages of the research process, which could be achieved through the development of a participative research methodology. A participative methodology conceptualises research as a collaborative or collective enterprise. It also positions the 'research subjects' as 'research participants' – or even as 'co-researchers' – and has the potential for democratising the research process and minimising the power imbalance between the researcher and the 'researched' (Martin 1994; Renzetti 1997). Renzetti (1997) argues that an important benefit of a participative methodology is that 'the most significant issues – from the perspective not only of the researcher but also of the researched – get identified and studied' (p. 142).

One of the most popular models of feminist participative research has been developed by Maguire (1987), who suggests that research should involve a combination of investigation, education and action. Referring to the work of Maguire (1987), Renzetti (1997) argues that:

In this model, the research relationship is clearly reciprocal rather than hierarchical. The researcher rather than being a detached expert, engages the participation of community members from the outset, recognizing that both parties bring to the project unique skills, knowledge, and resources. (p. 156)

Throughout this project, the women who were involved in the research were positioned as participants and I drew upon their particular skills, knowledge and resources from the early stages of the research process. There was an attempt to develop reciprocal relationships and to challenge the traditional hierarchy between the researcher and the participants, mainly through the development of a critical

discussion about the nature of the research and about the modalities of the research process; this discussion resulted in real changes in the configuration of the project. However, involving women in the research required a significant amount of time and financial resources and – as these resources were limited – it has not been possible to sustain this involvement into the later stages of the research process, i.e. through the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the findings. In this sense, this project fell short of the fully collective model of participative research proposed by Maguire (1987) and it remained a collaborative rather than a collective endeavour. Although the participants expressed a strong interest in the project and demonstrated a commitment to make it work, they continuously referred to the project as being 'my' research. Overall, as a researcher, I maintained considerable control over the research, particularly in the later stages of the research project. The difficulties I encountered in this regard have been echoed in the accounts of other researchers. For instance, Birch and Miller (2002) reflected upon their experiences of participative research in the following way:

For us, the notion of participation embodies specific ideals of how the researcher and researched should co-operate with each other in order to form a 'good', honest and reciprocal relationship ... However, the ideal of fully involving research respondents, for example by inviting comments on our interpretations of the research data, was hard to maintain over the different stages of the research process. We found that the research ideals of participation that we embraced at the outset eventually came into conflict with our personal goals of completing our projects and fitting into the requirements of the academic world. This conflict led us to desert the 'moral high ground' and re-interpret our earlier understanding of what participation should involve. (p. 92)

In this research project, the development of a qualitative and participative methodology involved a combination of group and individual interviews. The group interviews were primarily seen as a means of involving women in the early stages

of the research process and initiating with them a critical discussion, while the individual in-depth interviews aimed at gathering data on the women's personal experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. A short questionnaire was also used to collect socio-demographic data on the participants (see Appendix A) and fieldwork notes were recorded in a research diary.

Interviewing has been widely used by feminist researchers and has often been regarded as the most appropriate method for producing the kind of knowledge that feminists wish to make available and as 'being more in keeping with the politics of doing research as a feminist' (Maynard 1994, p. 11). Although this should not be seen as an 'orthodoxy' (Kelly *et al.* 1994; Maynard 1994), it is true that the use of interviews does enable the development of a more democratised research process and of more reciprocal relationships between the researcher and the participants. A further advantage of interviewing is that it constitutes a flexible and versatile research method (Reinharz 1992; Hesse-Biber 2007).

Because of the nature of the relationships involved in research interviews, the researcher is seen as an important 'tool' in the collection of data. In this regard, authors have argued that it might be necessary that female researchers conduct the interviews for women's experiences to be properly understood (Reinharz 1992, p. 23) and that interviews may in themselves be more suited to female than male researchers, because women are generally more prone to ask people what they think and how they feel and men tend to talk more, to interrupt more and to have their ideas pursued more readily (Reinharz 1992; Websdale 1998, 2001). These can indeed be seen as dominant men's practices, but such practices are not unavoidable and I argue that it is possible to avoid them; to do so, male

researchers need to be aware of the extent to which these dominant men's practices influence their actions and their interactions with women. To some extent, the skills that I developed during my social work training in terms of listening to people and asking them what they think and how they feel contrast with these dominant men's practices. Neil Websdale (1998, 2001), who conducted a qualitative study with women who had experienced domestic violence, suggests that for a male researcher to interview a woman may provide an opportunity to reverse dominant patterns of communication between women and men.

The use of interviews in the context of a qualitative and participative research raises the issue of the researcher's self-disclosure, whether the researcher be female or a male. It appears that a certain level of self-disclosure is necessary in order to develop relationships with the participants that are less hierarchical and more reciprocal (Oakley 1981). At the outset of the fieldwork, I presented myself to the potential participants in the following terms, through the flyers sent to potential participants (see Appendix B and Appendix C):

My name is Simon Lapierre. I am 25 years old and I am from Canada. I am currently a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being (University of Warwick) and I have previous experiences of research with women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

Subsequently, I answered numerous questions regarding both my professional and personal experiences as well as about my position in regard to the issues that were examined in this study:

Simon: I am a man and I am doing this research on domestic violence. It is not common; it is more women who do this kind of research.

Sonia: Have you ever seen domestic violence? ... Have you ever seen it? Has it been in your family or whatever? Is that why you have got

an interest in it, or what? Or is it because you have never seen it? Is that why you are interested in it?

Simon: You want to know why I am doing it? There are many reasons. It is so common domestic violence that of course I have friends and people from my family that have been through domestic violence, almost everybody knows someone who have experienced domestic violence. The other thing is that I have worked as a social worker for a few months and I realised that there is some work to do within social services. There is still work to do on domestic violence, to do better work with women and children who have experienced domestic violence. I think there is still work to be done and I think the best way to improve the work and improve the services is to ask women and also children who have been through it, to know what was for them the most difficult and these kind of things. I think it's the best way if you really want to make the services better for women and children is to ask them what they think.

Caroline: I am impressed, because she put you right on the spot there and you didn't just sit there and didn't know what to say, but you answered it.

As discussed below, there is an ethical dimension to this, as self-disclosure enables the research participants to give a more informed consent.

The next sections focus on the following four main aspects of the fieldwork for this research project: planning and entering the field; introducing the participants; initiating a critical discussion with women; and exploring women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Whilst the organisation of these sections suggests a linear process, the phases of the research were not entirely distinct and consecutive. For instance, the group interviews were aimed at initiating a critical discussion with the women, but they also provided rich data on women's experiences. I also started to carry out individual interviews while I was still conducting group interviews, simply because of the timing of access.

PLANNING AND ENTERING THE FIELD

The importance of thorough planning of the fieldwork is exemplified when researching sensitive topics (Lee 1993; Stanko and Lee 2003), which requires a particular attention to be paid to the ethical aspects of the project. This section of the chapter addresses the following three aspects of the planning of the research fieldwork: the ethical and practical considerations, the participation criteria and the negotiation of access.

Ethical and practical considerations

The experiences of women in relation to their mothering in the context of domestic violence constitute a sensitive research topic (Lee 1993; Stanko and Lee 2003). A focus on mothering may result in women feeling threatened because mothering is generally seen as a 'private' matter or because of the potential for stigmatisation or recrimination. For instance, the women may be worried about being judged or blamed and, in some cases, being subjected to a referral to social services on the grounds of child abuse or child neglect (for more details on this issue, see below). Although this study focused primarily on women's experiences of mothering, the issue of domestic violence raised even more important ethical considerations; researching domestic violence involves significant risks to the safety and well-being of the participants (Stanko and Lee 2003; Skinner *et al.* 2005). According to the World Health Organization (1999),

Researching abuse is not like other areas of investigation – the nature of the topic means that issues of safety, confidentiality and interviewer skills and training are even more important than in other forms of research. It is no exaggeration to say that the physical safety and mental well being of both the respondents and the research team can be put in jeopardy if adequate precautions are not taken. (p. 2)

At an early stage in the project, the research proposal was submitted for ethical scrutiny to a cross-departmental review process in place within the Faculty of Social Studies, at the University of Warwick. Moreover, a set of general ethical principles was provided in the guidelines published by the British Association of Social Workers (2002) in regard to social work research and by the World Health Organisation (1999) in regard to research on domestic violence. Overall, the safety and well-being of the participants were paramount throughout the project.

Notwithstanding the thorough planning and the elaboration of ethical and practical principles, a number of tensions and dilemmas arose in the course of the fieldwork.

As noted by Birch and her colleagues (Birch *et al.* 2002),

The complexities of researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena raise multiple ethical issues for the researcher that cannot be solved solely by the application of abstract rules, principles or guidelines. Rather, there are inherent tensions in qualitative research that is characterized by fluidity and inductive uncertainty, and ethical guidelines that are static and increasingly formalized. (p. 1)

This section addresses the main ethical and practical considerations that were addressed in the planning stage of the fieldwork. The tensions and dilemmas that arose in the course of the fieldwork are highlighted and discussed throughout the subsequent sections of the chapter.

The first ethical consideration was the issue of consent. All the participants were required to give explicit consent to taking part in a group interview or an individual interview – or both – and this was done through a research agreement between the participants and the researcher. The consent forms provided information regarding the nature and the modalities of the research (see Appendix D and Appendix E). In addition, the participants were given opportunities to raise additional questions

regarding the research or the researcher before giving consent. As pointed out by Miller and Bell (2002),

While informing participants about the research aims at the outset of a project is vital, final research findings may not resonate with those aims. The precise nature of 'consent' for the participants might only become clear eventually, at the end of a study, when the researchers' impact on shaping the study is visible. This raises questions about what is it that the participant is consenting to. Just 'participation', in the sense of being interviewed? (p. 54)

In this sense, it appeared that the women could give a more informed consent if they were able to ask questions about my professional and personal experiences as well as about my position in regard to the issues that were examined in this study; a certain level of self-disclosure was therefore necessary (see Oakley 1981). Despite an initial agreement, the participants could refuse to answer any of the questions that were asked during the interviews or could withdraw from the research process at any time without having to give a reason and without having to face pressure to continue.

The issue of confidentiality was also addressed through the research agreements. This was an important concern during the operationalisation of the fieldwork, but also through the preparation, analysis and interpretation of the data. During the fieldwork, the interviews were conducted in a private office and personal information regarding the participants was only accessible by the researcher. The participants were informed that their identity would remain confidential and that it would be unlikely that anybody would be able to connect the data to them.

However, the participants were also informed that confidentiality would be limited in any case of current harm or risk of harm to a child (see Mullender *et al.* 2002). In such cases, I would have shared my concerns with the woman and would have encouraged her to reach out for support. In cases where professional intervention

might have been judged necessary, a decision would have been reached in agreement with my supervisors and, if possible, the woman would have been informed of the procedures undertaken. During the preparation of the data, only the researcher and the women who transcribed the interviews had access to the tapes on which the interviews were recorded – the women who did the transcription work did not have access to any other information about the participants and were instructed to keep the information confidential. Following the transcription, a pseudonym was attributed to the participants and any information that could facilitate their identification was deleted, including the names of specific persons and places.

Given the fact that the women who participated in this study had been abused by their male partners and that this research focused on their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence, my position as a male researcher raised particular ethical and practical issues (see also Websdale 1998, 2001). It was anticipated that despite their interest in taking part in this study, some women might have felt unsafe or uncomfortable when sharing their personal experiences with a man. The group interviews appeared to be less problematic than the individual interviews in this regard, because the participants were not in a one-to-one interaction with the researcher and because they were not asked to talk about their personal experiences. Nonetheless, I planned to meet the potential groups prior to the interviews in order to present the research project and answer questions regarding the research project or the researcher. I also intended to have one female researcher or one female worker present during these meetings as well as during the group interviews. For the individual interviews, all the participants were offered the choice of being interviewed by me or by a female researcher.

They were also free to be accompanied by a friend or a professional during the interviews.

In order to ensure confidentiality and safety, I decided to conduct all the interviews in a private room within a public place, mainly at the organisations through which I negotiated access to the participants. Despite the rather formal atmosphere of some of these offices, I attempted to make the interviews feel more 'informal'. This was facilitated by bringing in tea, coffee and biscuits and by starting a general conversation first in a less formal setting such as the kitchen – while having lunch or making tea or coffee – or the courtyard.

In this research, the concern with diversity meant that two of the participants spoke little or no English and this required the work of an interpreter, which has particular implications that need to be explicitly addressed (Birbili 2000; Temple and Edwards 2002). For these two interviews, the interpreter was one of the workers at the refuge through which I recruited the participants; this appeared to be a sensible option, as the two participants asked for someone from the organisation to be present during the interviews. The worker was not a professional interpreter, but she was clearly fluent in both Punjabi and English. I arranged to meet the translator before the first interview, so that we could talk in more detail about the research project and about my perspective on the issues being discussed during the interviews (see Temple and Edwards 2002). I also agreed with her that she would be as precise as possible in the translation of the women's accounts – even if she felt that the answer was not appropriate or was not answering the question I had asked.

Drawing upon their work on the involvement of women who have experienced domestic violence in domestic violence services, Hague and Mullender (2005; see also Aris *et al.* 2003; Hague *et al.* 2003), argue that it is essential good practice that the women who offer their services in this way are offered expenses, together with transport and child care, and that it is even better when proper payment is provided. This was taken into account in this research project and the participants were paid £15 for each of their participations. Free transport and childcare were also made available, but these were rarely used as the interviews generally took place during school time at organisations located near the women's homes. On some occasions the participants made informal arrangements amongst themselves so that they could look after each other's children during the interviews.

Researching sensitive topics such as mothering in the context of domestic violence is likely to bring to the surface distressing experiences and the participants may require support following the interviews (see Kelly 1988, 1990). There is therefore an ethical responsibility for the researcher to make sure that such support is available. The majority of the women who participated in this study were already in contact with at least one organisation that had been offering them support in relation to their experiences of domestic violence. Nonetheless, I provided some of the women with a list of resources for women who have experienced domestic violence and I remained available so that they could contact me if they needed information or support.

Finally, I used consultation throughout the study as a strategy to ensure that the ethical and practical decisions that I made were sound and consistent with my concern to make the women's safety and well-being paramount. I consulted with

several women who adopt a feminist perspective and who I knew would openly tell me if they had any concerns regarding the ways in which I was conducting the research (see also Pringle 1995).

Participation criteria

The research used purposive sampling methods in order to determine the characteristics of the women who would participate in this research (Hesse-Biber 2007), and all the women who took part in this research project did so on a voluntary basis. The following two criteria were identified: the women needed to have experienced domestic violence (self-defined), which could include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse; and the women needed to have at least one child under 18 years old at the time when they were experiencing domestic violence. The number of criteria was kept to a minimum in order to encourage a greater diversity amongst the participants. Indeed, the study aimed at exploring the experiences of women in regard to their mothering in the context of domestic violence, while taking into account diversity in terms of the women's age, ethnicity, sexuality and dis/ability. Diversity was also considered in terms of the women's experiences of domestic violence and in terms of the services they had been in contact with in relation to mothering and domestic violence.

The decision not to explore the issue of class was informed by the well-documented difficulties involved in the operationalisation of this concept (see Reay 1996) and by the idea that these difficulties might have been exemplified by the fact that several participants were in a period of transition following the end of a violent relationship. In contrast, the issues of sexuality and dis/ability should have been taken into account, but the short questionnaire that was designed to collect socio-

demographic data did not address these issues (see Appendix A) and therefore no systematic information was collected. From the interviews, it is possible to know that at least two women were in a same-sex relationship and that a number of women had mobility impairments caused by the violence – at least temporarily.

Because the aim of a qualitative study is not to make generalisations, but to look at processes and at the meanings that individuals attribute to given social situations, it often involves working with a small number of research participants (Hesse-Biber 2007). The number of participants required in the study was not determined *a priori*. Instead, it was informed by the level of diversity amongst the women who participated in the study and the diversity of experiences represented in the data (see below). The number of interviews conducted was also informed by the pragmatic consideration of the time available within the normal scope of a doctoral study.

Negotiating access

Considering the important ethical and practical issues that were raised above, negotiating access to research participants was expected to involve a challenging and long-term process. The recruitment of participants in studies that look at the issue of domestic violence has been notoriously difficult and the fact that I was a male researcher was expected to exacerbate these difficulties. Notwithstanding these concerns, negotiating access happened to be a relatively straightforward and rapid process and the bulk of the fieldwork was conducted between January and April 2005.

As mentioned above, the first stage of the fieldwork involved a series of group interviews with women who had experienced mothering in the context of domestic violence, in order to initiate a critical discussion about the nature and modalities of the research. The decision was made to conduct these interviews with groups that were already in place to provide support for women who had experienced domestic violence. The advantage of using pre-existing groups was that it minimised some of the ethical and practical concerns – these groups were already meeting on a regular basis and the women who were involved in each of the groups already knew each others' stories – and it facilitated access. For practical reasons, I focused on organisations located within the West Midlands.

I initially contacted eight organisations that were potentially offering group sessions for women who had experienced domestic violence. I introduced myself and the research project in the course of a telephone conversation – generally with the workers who were responsible for running the group sessions – and I subsequently sent them copies of a flyer that was addressed both to organisations and to potential participants (see Appendix B). The flyer presented the general aim of the research and the objective of the group interviews – the term 'group discussion' was used in the flyer – and included information regarding the ethical aspects of the research. The flyer made it clear that to take part in this study was unlikely to have any direct effect on the women's lives, but that it could be an opportunity for them to talk freely about what they saw as being important in terms of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

The workers whom I contacted expressed overwhelming interest in the project. However, they raised questions about whether or not it was appropriate for women

who had experienced domestic violence to take part in a study of this nature. The majority of the organisations were protective and acted as 'gatekeepers'. This was echoed in the work on the involvement of women who have experienced domestic violence in domestic violence services, which involved a complex mixed-methodology study (Aris *et al.* 2003; see also Hague *et al.* 2003; Hague and Mullender 2005). The findings of this study revealed that

Far from seeing participation as a route to helping women regain control and confidence, workers in the field, ranging from refuge workers to statutory managers, often appeared to feel that the experience of men's abuse rendered women so vulnerable and in need of protection, from a range of outside influences as well as from their abusers, that they were usually not able to engage in consultative or participative processes, at least in the short term. Ways of expressing this view included 'survivors have enough to deal with already' and 'they should not remind themselves'. Some thought that participation was advisable 'once survivors have some distance from the experience', while others thought that survivors needed refuge workers to represent them because 'women are not strong enough while they are residents'. (Aris *et al.* 2003, p. 157)

Aris and her colleagues (Aris *et al.* 2003) argue that these kinds of explanations are problematic and potentially disempowering for women, as 'the view that underpins this blanket approach to survivor involvement could potentially exclude all women while they are still using services, and possibly beyond' (p. 158).

As was anticipated, additional concerns were raised regarding the fact that I was a male researcher. These concerns generally appeared to have been overcome by the end of the telephone conversations, once the workers knew more about the research and the theoretical approach that underpinned it, my motivation for undertaking the study and my connection to a well-established feminist research centre. Interestingly, despite these initial concerns, no organisation – even the organisations that contributed to the project by giving me access to participants –

required to see evidence of my check by the Criminal Records Bureau, which I had had done specifically for the purpose of this project.

Group interviews were arranged with three of the eight organisations that I contacted. The first was a small group of women activists, who were primarily interested in issues around child contact and domestic violence. One of the flyers produced by this group gives a clear sense of the nature of the organisation:

Many women are coerced by the court system into agreeing to father-child contact despite the fear for the safety of their children ... Some women who have survived domestic violence find that the perpetrator uses contact as a means to continue the abuse, so that women remain trapped in the situation despite having left their partner. If you (or someone you know) are affected by these issues, and would like to get the law changed to protect women and children, join us ... We must take action, grouping together and supporting each other. (Organisation's flyer)

The other two organisations that collaborated with me in this project were family centres. In addition, the domestic violence worker from one community centre that I had not contacted had heard about the study and manifested her interest in contributing to the project.

Amongst the other organisations, four were not running group sessions with women who had experienced domestic violence at the time of the research. These organisations included two family centres, one community centre and one women centre. The remaining organisation – a women centre – was running sessions and initially decided to collaborate in this project but, as the worker who was responsible for the group left on maternity leave, it was difficult to make contact with another worker within the organisation in order to plan the group interview.

All these organisations were informed that there was a second stage to the research project, which involved individual interviews with women in order to find

out more about their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Only one worker stated that her organisation had systematically refused to collaborate in research projects that involved referring individual women for interviews where they have to talk about their personal experiences.

Most of the recruitment of women to take part in individual interviews happened through the group interviews; one woman from the activist group, three women from one of the family centres and nine women from the community centre accepted the invitation to take part in an individual interview. However, following a preliminary analysis of the data, two specific issues appeared to require further exploration: the experiences of women from black and minority ethnic communities and women's experiences of contact with social services. On this basis, I contacted an Asian refuge in order to recruit women from black and minority communities. The worker agreed to collaborate in the project and put me in contact with two women. These interviews were conducted in July 2005.

At the same time, I contacted one local authority in order to recruit women who had been in contact with social services. They agreed to collaborate in the project, but after several months they informed me that they had not been able to find any women interested in participating in the study. I then decided to contact the *domestic violence worker at the community centre* and asked her if she knew about women who had been in contact with social services and who might be interested in taking part in an individual interview; she put me in contact with five additional women. These interviews were conducted in May 2006.

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

In total, 26 women participated in this study; thirteen women took part in both group interviews and individual interviews, six women took part only in group interviews, and seven women took part only in individual interviews. The data gathered in the short questionnaire that was designed to gather socio-demographic information about the participants (see Appendix A) demonstrated significant levels of diversity amongst the participants in terms of both their age and their ethnicity. At the time of the interviews, the women were aged between 21 to 67 years old; their children were aged between one and 44 years old. In terms of the women's ethnicity, 16 women identified themselves as White-British, two as Irish, one as Scottish, one as Black-Caribbean, one as Black-Other, one as Indian, one as Pakistani and one as White-European. As mentioned above, the interviews revealed that at least two women were in same-sex relationships at the time of the interviews and that a number of women had had mobility impairments caused by the violence – at least temporarily.

In terms of their experiences of domestic violence, all the participants had experienced psychological and emotional abuse, and the majority mentioned experiences of physical abuse. A small number of women also talked about sexual violence. Most of the participants had experienced repeated and long-term violence. The majority of the women were no longer in an intimate relationship with their violent partner at the time of the interviews. Only one woman was still in an intimate relationship with her violent partner, and she described their relationship in the following terms:

Pam: He [partner] came out of prison and we've never looked back, we've never looked at the past and what's happened. It's always looking forward ... He's got to go to a course because he is on probation for two years ... It's like an anger-management thing, but it's a strong one.

Despite being separated, several women were still experiencing post-separation violence at the time of the interviews.

The questionnaire also revealed that the women had been in contact with a wide range of voluntary and statutory services. These services included refuges, the police, housing, social services, family proceedings courts, contact centres, health visitors and general practitioners.

INITIATING A CRITICAL DISCUSSION WITH WOMEN

Five group interviews were conducted with a total of 19 women. The first interview was conducted with two women who had been involved in the activist group. One female colleague was also present during the interview. The participants did not feel that it was necessary to arrange a meeting prior to the interview. About one hour before the beginning of the interview one of the women informed me that her son was 'poorly' and had not been to school; she was still interested in taking part in the group interview and wanted to know if she could bring her son with her to the interview.

I felt that, conducting a study on the difficulties of mothering, it would have been inappropriate to cancel the interview due to the presence of the woman's child – particularly that the woman wished to take part in the group interview. On the other hand, it would have been inappropriate to conduct the interview with the child in the room ... In fact, this reflects the difficulties faced by women in their everyday lives. Women survivors have to try to come to term with their histories of domestic violence, but always need to be careful of what they say in front of their children. (Fieldwork notes 28 January 2005)

Fortunately, I was able to rely on a colleague to look after the child during the course of the interview.

The second and third interviews were conducted with ten women and the worker at the community centre. I initially planned to go into one of the group sessions in order to present the research project, and then to go back the following week to meet the women who were interested in taking part in a group interview. However, the women immediately manifested an interest in the research and started to talk about their concerns and about their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence; I was there for two hours. Nonetheless I went back to meet this group of women the following week to conduct a further group interview.

The fourth interview was conducted with four women at one of the family centres. The worker who was responsible for this group felt that it was not necessary to arrange a meeting prior to the interview. A few minutes before the interview the worker informed me that it was no longer possible for her to be present during the interview; as she had previously discussed this issue with the participants and they consented to meet me without her being there, I decided to carry on with the interview.

The fifth interview was conducted with three women and the worker at the other family centre. Again, the worker did not feel that it was necessary to arrange a meeting prior to the interview. Although the participation criteria were clearly presented in the flyer, one of the women informed me at the beginning of the interview that she did not have children. I felt that to exclude this woman from the group interview would have been inappropriate, so I decided to include her in the group interview.

Conducting the group interviews

Prior to these interviews, I designed a topic guide and I conducted a pilot group interview with a group constituted of seven female students who were doing an MA in Social Work at the University of Warwick. This pilot was tape-recorded and observed by one of my supervisors who subsequently commented upon it. In the light of this exercise, the main concern was that the interview might have been too long and that I needed to spend less time on the first part of the topic guide.

The objective of the group interviews was to initiate a critical discussion with the women about the research, and the topic guide focused on different aspects of the research (see Appendix F). The first part of the topic guide aimed at gathering women's views on the main concepts that were used in the study, particularly 'being a mother', 'domestic violence' and 'abuse'. After having reminded the participants that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, the following generic question was used for each of the three concepts:

When you hear the expression 'being a mother'/'domestic violence'/'abuse', what are the first words that come to your mind?

To discuss women's views on these concepts was seen as a way of developing a shared understanding of the issues central to this study and to enable the emergence of new or alternative concepts. The following two questions were also used, if the information had not emerged spontaneously:

For you, what is the meaning of this expression?

Is there a better way to say the same thing?

Although the concept of 'child neglect' was of particular interest at this stage of the research, it was judged as being too sensitive to be introduced at the beginning of the interviews (see below).

The second part of the topic guide aimed at identifying the main concerns in regard to mothering in the context of domestic violence, so that these issues could be explored further in the individual interviews. More specifically, it aimed at identifying the main difficulties that women face when they experience mothering in the context of domestic violence. This part of the topic guide also aimed at identifying the main services that should have been considered in the study and the reasons these specific services should be considered.

It is at this stage that the concept of 'child neglect' was introduced, if this issue had not been raised by the women themselves. Given the sensitive nature of this issue, I introduced it with caution, using the following quote from a woman who participated in a study on children's experiences of domestic violence: 'I was so busy placating him that I neglected my children' (Mullender *et al.* 2002, p. 159).

The last part of the topic guide aimed at obtaining inputs from the women regarding the more ethical and practical aspects of the research. The main issues that were discussed in this part of the interviews referred to the use of individual interviews and my position as a male researcher. This part of the topic guide also considered women's views on the ways in which the findings could be disseminated as well as on its potential contribution.

There were challenges in conducting these group interviews. The main challenge was to deal with the comments that, though made by women, could undermine other women in the group:

What I found the most difficult was to deal with the women's divergent views without taking a position, particularly when one's views might have undermined other participants. For instance, I felt uncomfortable when one woman said: 'I think women who stay with a violent partner are selfish'. Although I strongly disagree with this statement, I found that it was more appropriate and useful to allow the other participants to express their contrasting view on this issue. (Fieldwork notes, 22 March 2005)

This was connected to the issue of control over the interviews. The issue of control was complicated by the fact that I was a male researcher. While I had to lead the interviews, I was cautious not to reproduce dominant men's practices and dominant patterns of communication between women and men (see also Websdale 1998, 2001). Following the interview with the group of women at the community centre, I wrote the following in my fieldwork notes:

Leading a group of eleven women who obviously had a lot to say is not an easy task! Because the aim of the interviews was to involve women in the research process and to see what was important for them, I felt that it was more important to listen to them than to stick to my topic guide. Moreover, as a man working with women who have experienced abuse, I felt that I had to be really careful about control – the research should not be another site of male control over women. (Fieldwork notes, 22 March 2005).

The outcomes of the discussion

The group interviews were primarily aimed at involving the women in the research process and at initiating a critical discussion with them about the nature and the modalities of the research. Therefore, the data gathered during the group interviews were primarily analysed in terms of the contribution they could make to the subsequent stages of the research. Four out of the five group interviews were tape-recorded. Following the interviews, I transcribed the content of these interviews into Microsoft Word. Given the relatively small amount of data, the use of specialist software was not required and the analysis was done manually. The

analysis was done accordingly to the three parts of the topic guide, and the main themes for each part were identified.

The data gathered in the first part of the interviews demonstrated that women's views on the concept of 'being a mother' tended to emphasise the tasks involved in mothering and the expectations placed upon women as mothers. There was also a general understanding of what domestic violence and abuse were, but there was no agreement amongst the participants about which one was the most appropriate. An important point that was raised in all the interviews referred to the idea that domestic violence or abuse should encompass psychological and emotional abuse as well as physical abuse.

The data gathered in the second part of the group interviews emphasised the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence. An important point that was raised by the participants referred to the necessity to consider women's experiences of mothering while they are going through domestic violence but also during and after the separation. The most significant services appeared to be refuges, the police and social services.

In the third part of the interviews, the women thought that it was a good idea to conduct individual interviews and several women expressed their interest in taking part. Nonetheless, the women thought that conducting individual interviews required more caution than conducting group interviews, as illustrated in the following extracts:

Angela: In one-to-one discussions, I think you have to make the women you are interviewing feel at ease, comfortable. In a group discussion like this we can always lean on each other, but one-to-one you may touch a raw nerve unintentionally and they could get defensive ... Make them feel at ease, you know, how you have

done it with us today. Really explain before you start, so that they totally understand.

Denise: And don't force them to answer a question if you see that they are shying away. If they are not coming forward with it say, 'Fair enough, if you don't want to answer you don't want to. I would like an answer, but if you don't want to, that is fine, no problem'.

The participants also mentioned that women who are still living with their violent partners might find it more difficult to be interviewed by a male researcher. In addition, they pointed out that some women might feel uncomfortable when talking about sexual violence with a male researcher.

It should be noted that whilst the women were not asked about their personal experiences during the group interviews, they did talk at length about their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The data on women's experiences were subsequently incorporated with the data gathered during the individual interviews for further analysis (see below).

EXPLORING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In total, 20 individual interviews were conducted; all the women who agreed to take part in an individual interview asked for me to conduct the interview. The first thirteen interviews were done with women who had previously taken part in group interviews, and were thus facilitated by the fact that I had previously met these participants.

As for the group interviews, the individual interviews required flexibility. For instance, on one occasion the worker at the community centre informed me that the participant was the next-door neighbour and that I would need to go to her place to

conduct the interview as there was no room available at the community centre. I agreed to do the interview at the woman's home, given that she had accepted with this arrangement, that I would be introduced to the woman by the worker, and that there were several people around the house.

At the beginning of another interview, the participant told me that she had not experienced domestic violence, but that she had witnessed domestic violence when she was a child and that she would like to talk about it. I decided not to stop the interview, although this woman did not meet the participation criteria. During the interview, it became clear that the women had in fact experienced domestic violence – mainly psychological and emotional abuse.

Conducting the individual interviews

The topic guide for the individual interviews was largely based on the data that were gathered during the group interviews (see Appendix G). The first part of the topic guide considered the general issue of mothering, particularly the meanings that the women gave to their mothering and their perspectives on the general expectations that are placed upon women as mothers. It also explored women's views on the similarities and differences between mothering and fathering.

The second part focused on the women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence, including when they were going through domestic violence as well as during and after the separation process. Consistent with the data from the group interviews, the emphasis was on the main difficulties that were involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence. Although the strategies that were developed by the women in these circumstances did not emerge as an important

issue in the group interviews, they were also explored in this part of the topic guide. This part of the topic guide also considered the general issue of support for women in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

The third part of the topic guide focused on the women's experiences of contact with a range of voluntary and statutory services; it considered how these services perceived women as mothers and what they expected from them. The women were also asked to give their overall evaluation of these services.

PREPARATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

The phase of data analysis and interpretation constitutes a process through which the participants' 'private' lives are transformed into public knowledge and theory (Edwards and Ribbens 1998; Mauthner and Doucet 1998). It is important to keep the participants' 'voices' and perspectives alive within this, while at the same time recognising the researcher's role in shaping the research process and its outcomes (Mauthner and Doucet 1998). Indeed,

Far removed from our respondents, we make choices and decisions about their lives: which particular issues to focus on in the analysis; how to interpret their words; and which extracts to select for quotation ... We are in the privileged position of naming and presenting other people's realities. Thus, in turning private issues into public concerns, and in giving our respondents a voice in public arenas, we have to ask ourselves whether we are in fact appropriating their voices and experiences, and further disempowering them by taking away their voices, agency and ownership. (Mauthner and Doucet 1998, p. 138-139).

As mentioned above, a qualitative and participative methodology provides a space for women's 'voices' to be listened to and articulated, as opposed to the imposing of externally defined structures upon women's lives (Reinharz 1992; Maynard 1994;

Skinner *et al.* 2005) and an analysis of these 'voices' can lead to the development of a feminist standpoint (Kelly *et al.* 1994; Thompson 2991).

All the individual interviews were tape-recorded. I transcribed the first eight individual interviews in order to familiarise myself further with the data, and I employed someone to transcribe the remaining interviews. The women who did the transcription work had done it several times before, but we nonetheless discussed the technical aspects of the work as well as the issue of confidentiality. I also made sure that they felt comfortable with the topic and the content of the interviews and I remained available to discuss any emotional or technical difficulties that they might have encountered during the transcription of the interviews (see Kelly *et al.* 1994). Once all the transcription work was complete, I verified the quality and accuracy of the transcription and I changed all the names and deleted any information that would have made it possible for the participants to be recognised.

The transcripts were then imported into N*Vivo, a specialist software that was used as a tool to conduct the data analysis (Gibbs 2002), and data gathered during the group interviews about the participants' experiences were also incorporated. The main objective of the analysis was to identify recurrent and significant themes that could be seen as dominant 'patterns' in the data (see Frye 1990). The following general themes were first inducted from the data: motherhood/mothering, domestic violence, mothering through domestic violence, mothering during and after separation, and support/intervention.

All the interviews were coded according to these categories. The data within each of these categories were then examined and new codes were identified. This

process was repeated several times until each code was sufficiently narrow and specific to encompass only one unit of sense.

The first stage of analysis focused on the issue on the data coded under the category motherhood/mothering in order to identify general patterns, which can be interpreted as elements of the institution of motherhood. This provided an insight into the institution of motherhood, which was subsequently used in the interpretation of the findings in the following stages of the analysis.

The second stage of analysis examined the data coded under the categories mothering through domestic violence and mothering during and after separation. Again, general patterns were identified in these data in order to provide an understanding of women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The third stage of analysis focused on the data coded under the category support/intervention. At this stage, data related to women's definitions of positive support were examined, and then general patterns were identified in the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services.

These findings from the second and third stages of analysis were then re-examined against the background of the findings from the first stage of analysis, in order to determine the extent to which, and the ways in which, women's experiences reflected and were influenced by the institution of motherhood.

The findings that are presented in the following three chapters use a large number of extracts from the interviews, as an attempt to keep women's 'voices' and perspectives alive.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the empirical aspects of the study and has considered the ways in which the theoretical assumptions that underpinned this project translated into the epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects of the research. It has begun by addressing the empirical considerations that underpinned this research in terms of the development of a feminist standpoint and has justified the choice of a qualitative and participative methodology. It has also reviewed and discussed the main aspects of the fieldwork and of the preparation, analysis and interpretation of the data. The women who participated in this study have also been introduced in this chapter.

The next three chapters present the findings from this study. Chapter Five proposes an insight into the institution of motherhood, which provides the backdrop for the following two chapters. Chapter Six focuses on mothering in the context of domestic violence and considers the centrality of mothering in men's violence. It also considers women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence as well as during and after the separation process. Chapter Seven addresses the issue of support for women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

According to the epistemological stance espoused in the previous chapter, women's experiences may provide the basis for the development of an understanding of the patriarchal ideologies and structures in which these experiences take place. In the research reported here, the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood are of particular interest (see Chapter Three) and this chapter starts from the experiences of the women who participated in this research in order to provide an insight into this institution. This insight provides the backdrop for the following chapters and is central in identifying the particular set of ideas that influence women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence and their contacts with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which address themes that emerged from the interviews and that can be conceptualised as important dimensions of the institution of motherhood. The first section considers the extent to which children are seen as being women's responsibility and raises some of the implications this has for the organisation of work within the family and in society. The second section discusses the concept of 'good' mothering and identifies some of the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering. Finally, the third section looks at the issue of mother-blaming.

Although the findings reported in this chapter support the existence of powerful ideologies and structures, it is necessary to recognise that there are differences

between women – including differences between the women who participated in this study:

Angela: Every mother is different; there is not two of us who would bring up our children in the same way.

Whilst these women had to engage with the institution of motherhood and generally expressed a strong desire to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering, they presented diverse responses in relation to their mothering and most women questioned, challenged or resisted some aspects of the institution of motherhood at some points during the interviews. These issues highlight the women's agency and are addressed throughout the chapter.

CHILDREN AS WOMEN'S RESPONSIBILITY

Despite the important diversity amongst the participants, all the women who took part in this study expressed an overwhelming sense of responsibility in regard to their children:

Shelly: Being a mum ... It's something like, it is my responsibility; the child is my responsibility and, to be responsible, I think I get a lot of enjoyment out of it.

For the women, this sense of responsibility seemed to be enduring. It generally started when the women realised that they were pregnant and was not seen as something that disappeared when the children were eighteen years old:

Sunita: Mothers are always gonna be worried for their kids, no matter whatever their age ... You know, you're not gonna stop worrying, whether they are in Uni one day or whatever they do. You'll still have that worry, being a mum.

This was more evident in the accounts by the oldest women amongst the participants, who continued to take responsibility for their children and to provide them with financial, practical and emotional support after they were eighteen years old. For instance, Alice talked about feeling obliged to provide her three adult children with such support:

Alice: It has always been me, and, up to this stage, always still been me struggling with the situation of the children and how they're feeling. You know, they still come back to me ... Sometimes I get to the stage now where I say 'I'd like to just leave the country and just leave them [my children] to deal with it [their problems]'. You know, because I'm now [in my forties] and these kids are adults. But they're still the same.

In one of the group interviews, Janet also talked about how she felt in regard to having to provide her adult daughter with emotional support:

Janet: Sometimes you feel suffocated by the children, no time to yourself. My daughter is [in her forties] now. When she was a child, if she was sitting on the settee she was leaning right on me, and when she was fourteen. And she still does it now. And I think, 'God when am I ever ...'

The findings suggested that the women's sense of responsibility was rooted in the broad assumption that children are primarily women's responsibility, regardless of the context in which mothering takes place. Indeed, this assumption was identified throughout the interviews, and was largely taken for granted by the women. At some points, it was elicited through expressions such as 'women's role' and 'women's duty':

Lorraine: They [children] just say 'thank you' to me for being there for them. And that's my *role* as a mother.

Sunita: It's just a *duty* that you have to do; you're bringing them [children] out in this world, it's your *duty*.

These expressions implied that there is little or no choice for women but to take responsibility for their children and to perform the work involved in mothering, even if they do not want to do so or if the reality did not always correspond to their expectations:

Bridget: Mothers are really, really important and all that, because I think they still basically do most of the stuff, whether they want to or not.

Liz: It's quite a shock at first, because you're expecting a little bit of help, you know; I didn't get any at all. So I just got on with it; there's nothing I could do, really.

The idea that the women had little or no choice in this matter was further reinforced by the idea that mothering is the direct outcome of women's biology and reproduction. In this sense, the institution of motherhood and the actual conditions of mothering were seen as being natural and unavoidable:

Sunita: She [the mother] is the one who gives birth, she is the one who has them [children] and she is the one who has to deal with the kids.

Alison: Because it's the woman that's had the child, it's the woman who should look after it.

In the interviews, the connection between the actual conditions of mothering and women's biology was reinforced through the use of concepts such as 'maternal bond' and 'maternal love'. The women who talked about the 'bond' they had had with their children perceived it as being something extremely important and powerful:

Kate: My bond between myself and my children is stronger than any other bond.

Angela: The mother has that maternal bond with her child. Like they say, you know, you can be pregnant and not want the child and maybe adopt it out, but even though you don't have that child with you,

you'll still have those maternal feelings for that child, years later. If you lose a child, you still have the maternal feelings, even though the child is not there. So I think, yeah, ultimately it is down to the mother, because I don't think a mother can ever walk away from her children, even if they don't live with her; there is always something there pulling you back ... I really do think that it is a biological thing of being female; you just have this attachment.

In contrast, Alison talked about how she felt when she was going through what she called 'postnatal depression' and thought that she had lost the 'bond' that she used to have with her children:

Alison: The postnatal [depression] after I had my last daughter took me ... And then I felt as if I was distant. I could recognise my children, but it felt like if there was no bond and I didn't know them. It was really weird, it was horrible, terrible.

The concept of 'maternal bond' is connected to the idea of 'maternal love', which was present in all the interviews. This was also perceived by the women as being something extremely important:

Sunita: I love my children to bits.

Joanne: I totally love them [my children]; I love them to bits.

The women saw 'maternal love' as a particular form of love, mainly because of its intense, selfless and unconditional nature:

Angela: I would say it is ingrained as a woman and as a mother ... People used to say to me, the first time I was pregnant, 'You won't believe it, when you give birth, it's like you get all these feelings and everything else ...' I thought, 'Oh god, you know, no you don't, you learn to love it like you'd learn to love another person'. But it's true ... Every time I have given birth, within minutes of giving birth, you just get this sudden rush of emotion that this new life that you've just brought into the world, and the bond, and the urge to just pick it up and cradle it and keep it safe is really overwhelming ... I know my partner said, when our daughter was being born ... he just loved her straight away, but I don't think it's quite the same context. I mean, to be blunt, it's like you are the one who has

carried it for the last nine months and have bonded with it pre-birth and post-birth.

Lucy: See, real love, unselfish love; I'd do anything for my kids, anything. You know, I'd go without clothes to clothe my kids. I'd go without food to feed my kids.

Razia's interpreter: She [Razia] sacrificed, you know, everything in her life and that is what a mother's love is about.

Although the concepts of 'maternal bond' and 'maternal love' reinforced the obligations that had been placed upon them in terms of taking responsibility for their children and performing the work involved in mothering, the women did not perceive these ideas as being constraining. The women, rather, emphasised the sense of happiness and satisfaction that came out of the relationships that they had had with their children, which was reported as being the most positive dimension of their experiences of mothering:

Sunita: They [my children] are everything to me. I love them to bits and I'm proud of them ... They bring you a lot of happiness ... Kids is the most important thing; kids are the most precious things that have been in your life to you.

Sharon: Every day they [my children] will come home with big pictures with 'I love you mummy, you are the best mummy' ... Every day I get a kiss and a big cuddle, you know, they will just come in whether they have been at school or at their mates, 'We love you mum, you're great'.

In fact, the women seemed to argue that it was primarily this sense of happiness and satisfaction that pushed them to take responsibility for their children and to perform the work involved in mothering, which obscures the role played by the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood. To a large extent, the participants supported the idea that women who love their children and who have developed a proper 'bond' with them are happy to take responsibility for them and to perform the work involved in mothering – and that women who do not

perform such work or who are not happy to do so do not love their children or have not developed a proper 'bond' with them. For the women, caring about and caring for their children were two inextricably connected aspects of mothering.

Whilst the majority of the women who participated in this study did not question the concepts of 'maternal bond' and 'maternal love', one woman did oppose the idea that the women who do not perform the work involved in mothering do not love their children or have not developed a proper 'bond' with them. In her account, Sarah reported that her unwillingness to provide physical care for her newly born daughter was not due to an inability to 'bond' with her child, but rather to anxieties resulting from a history of sexual abuse in her own childhood:

Sarah: At first when I had my eldest daughter, I didn't want to bath her, I didn't want to change her nappies ... I was bonding with her. It was just that thought in the back of your mind: what if I turn out like him [my father]?

Overall, it seems that the idea that the current conditions of mothering are the direct outcomes of biological rather than social processes serves the patriarchal institution of motherhood by constraining women, but also by keeping men free from both responsibility and work in relation to their children. In this sense, two women suggested that it is more difficult for men than for women to take responsibility for their children and to perform the work involved in mothering, for example:

Shelly: I think it is because the woman has carried the child inside her for nine months and she's got that different bond than the father. I think it must be hard for fathers that way, because they haven't carried that child inside them and it is just there one day. And I think that makes it different.

In contrast, some of the women noted the general potential for men to perform some of the work involved in mothering. This was generally expressed in terms of the potential for men to support women in what remained their own responsibility:

Liz: These days, things are progressing more; men should take a bigger part in helping to bring up children, it shouldn't be all left to the mother, especially when the mother has to go out to work in the evening when he comes in to get more money to look after the children better.

Indeed, only a small number of women talked about the possibility of men taking full responsibility for their children and of performing most of the work typically undertaken by women as mothers:

Kerry: I think nowadays it's, like, changing, because you've got the stay-at-home dads and, you know, they don't want to go to work and they don't mind staying at home with the kids and the mum is the one who goes out and have a break.

Overall, the data gathered in this study suggested that, despite growing interest in men's involvement in the care of children, different expectations continue to be placed upon women as mothers and men as fathers:

Bridget: I think it has changed a lot recently, or in the eighties, with the new man stuff. I think there is a new thing that fathers are much more hands on and all that kind of thing, but I still think that you do get to choose if you are someone's dad; you do get to choose exactly how much you are going to do, unless somebody leaves you with the baby and goes, kind of thing ... I think men have got to do a hell of a lot less for people to kind of, you know, throw up their hands in admiration ... 'Oh yeah, look, he's changing nappies, wow' ...

Furthermore, the women made clear that the final responsibility for children lay with their mothers:

Angela: Yeah, it's ultimately down to the mother, because the father or the male in the relationship can ultimately walk away; any time he wants he can pack up his bags and walk out the door, whereas the mother has that maternal bond with her child.

Lorraine: You're always gonna be there for your child, no matter what ... Some fathers are there for their kids too, but not as much as the mother, because it's the mother that's got the bond with the child.

Finally, these findings reflected a particular organisation of work within the family, which is rooted in the nuclear model of family constituted of a heterosexual couple and their children, with the man bringing home the wage and the woman looking after the children and the home. In addition, these findings reflected the 'public'- 'private' dichotomy and located the responsibility for children and the work involved in mothering within the 'private' sphere of the family. Indeed, only one woman challenged the assumption that the responsibility for children is primarily a 'private' matter:

Bridget: I think it would be a lot healthier if children were everybody's responsibility. I don't just mean parents'. I mean everybody's, because, yeah, I just do think children would be kind of better and people wouldn't be so screwed up and stuff.

Notwithstanding these findings, it appears that it is not only the assumption that women are responsible for their children that is problematic, it is also the vastness of the task of mothering. This task is defined according to the dominant ideas regarding what constitutes 'good' mothering.

STANDARDS OF 'GOOD' MOTHERING

Throughout the interviews, the women continuously referred to the concept of 'good' mothering, but only a small number of women mentioned the problematic nature of this concept:

Kate: I wouldn't say there are good mothers and bad mothers.

Denise: No it's not fair. No, it's not right. There is no such thing as a perfect mother; but society is very wrong and it is society and the way society perceives things.

All the participants expressed a strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be perceived as such. In this context, the concept of 'good' mothering seemed to refer more to 'perfect' mothering than to 'good enough' or 'acceptable' mothering:

Lucy: To be this *perfect mother* who gets up, you know, functions and cleans the house, and cooks the dinner, makes everyone happy.

Sunita: I want them [my children] to turn one day and say you're a *brilliant mum*. You know, that's all I want ...

Despite the important diversity amongst the participants, the data gathered in this study demonstrated a high level of consistency in the women's descriptions of what constitutes 'good' mothering. The dominant social construction of 'good' mothering that was revealed in these findings seemed to be imposed upon women by the 'society' and by so called 'experts', with the obligation for women to conform to it:

Angela: I think sometimes the society expects you to have a sort of, like a code, if you like, to stick to; like a set of rules, that, as a mother, this is the rules of life that you should stick to.

The women talked about 'good' mothering in universal terms. Indeed, for these women the standards of 'good' mothering were the same regardless of the context in which mothering takes place – including the context of domestic violence:

Denise: The role of a mother doesn't change, whether you're married, single or living with abuse.

According to the participants, as mothers women are expected to meet the following standards of 'good' mothering: to put their children first, to care for them, to protect them and to provide a positive 'role model'.

Before discussing these four themes, it is important to note that the broad concept of children's needs appeared to be the most significant factor in determining what constitutes 'good' mothering. Indeed, the actions that are expected of women as mothers are all aimed at meeting the needs of their children and ensuring their 'normal' development. The women reported that children have a wide range of physiological and emotional needs and require their mothers' constant attention and attendance:

Denise: Being a mother is about looking after your children ... you know, being responsible for their lives completely, from when they wake up to even when they are asleep.

Liz: Caring for children, being there for them all the time, making sure they're happy ... And their well-being.

Consequently, the extent to which children's needs are met was seen as being an indicator of the quality of women's mothering. The cleanliness and tidiness of the children were perceived as being particularly significant, because of their potential for providing visible and tangible 'measures' of the quality of mothering:

Fiona: Everyone said how clean and well looked after these children are.

Moreover, a direct connection was established between women's mothering, children's needs and children's behaviours – when they are children and later when they are adults. Indeed, children's behaviours were seen as being direct outcomes of women's mothering and of the ways in which their needs had been met.

Therefore, children's behaviours were also perceived as being visible and tangible 'measures' of the quality of women's mothering.

Sally: Children should be well brought up, well behaved.

Kate: I was in the supermarket and she [daughter] had gone off to play on the little ride that they have in the supermarkets for kids. And she wanted to come back to me ... She turned around and said 'Excuse me please' to the couple behind me, and they actually commented on it. And that made me feel proud ... You feel that proud because you think to yourself, 'I taught you that'. It is the same thing when they come home from school with a certificate for good behaviour or good work.

The assumption that children's behaviours are direct outcomes of women's mothering is particularly problematic, because it obscures the importance of the diverse contexts in which mothering takes place as well as the other social relations and environments in which children are located; these are also likely to have an effect on their behaviour. Obviously, this has particular implications in terms of mothering in the context of domestic violence.

Putting children first: motherhood subsumes all aspects of women's lives

One of the most important themes that emerged from the interviews was the idea that women should always put their children first. This theme was largely taken for granted by the women who took part in this study:

Sunita: You always have to put your kids first.

This idea implied that women also have to prioritise the needs of their children over their own needs:

Kate: A mother doesn't care about herself; her thoughts are for her children.

Denise: A mother always, in my opinion, always takes the back wall; you always put, you know, your children first or your partner first, it is always your needs that come at the back.

This assumption is congruent with the concept of 'maternal love', discussed above, which was seen as a selfless and unconditional form of love. In her account, Razia talked about the need for women to sacrifice everything for their children and mentioned that the love she had for her children meant that she was happy to do so:

Razia's interpreter: Mum has to sacrifice everything ... It is difficult, but she is not holding it against the children, you know, this and that. She is quite happy to. It is a sacrifice that she is willing to make and that's what means being a mum and that's mother's love.

Moreover, the assumption that women should prioritise the needs of their children over everything else implied that mothering should be the women's most important activity. To some extent, the participants considered that this means that women should not engage in activities or work outside the home, particularly if it is not primarily for their children's sake:

Kerry: The mum is supposed to stay at home.

These findings suggested that, once women have children, motherhood subsumes all other aspects for their lives:

Kate: The kids end up being, like, your world, if you like.

In the same vein, one woman did mention that women can have their own lives, but only as long as they continue to prioritise the needs of their children over their own needs:

Sunita: Having your own life, but at same time, you know, to be there and putting them [your children] first.

In contrast, a small number of women expressed difficulties in always having to prioritise their children's needs over their own needs and not being able to engage in activities other than mothering:

Lucy: I feel lonely and I feel, like, is my life only about caring for these children? Am I never gonna have, you know, someone for me? A something in my life? And that makes me feel a bit, not against the boys, but I feel a bit sad about the situation. Do you know what I mean? Like, because they'll grow up, go off and get married, and they'll have their families and that. And, after I raised them, I will be this older woman, you know, all on my own. And I think I've got to do something about my life.

Bridget: Self-sacrifice, really, ridiculous self-sacrifice ... You are not meant to want to do things for yourself anymore. Because I went back to doing my degree and spoke to loads of people, other mothers of babies, and other people and so many people were like 'But he his eight weeks old, you can't do that, he needs his mum and bonding' ... And I found if I said 'Yes, but if I had a degree I would be able to provide for him better' and stuff, which was maybe partly it, but really I wanted to finish my degree. But it is more acceptable for people, you know, everything had to be couched in terms of this will be better for [child].

Caring for children: an expansive concept

The second standard of 'good' mothering that emerged from the interviews referred to the assumption that women should care for their children. As mentioned above, children are seen as having a wide range of needs and as requiring their mothers' constant attention and attendance. Consequently, women appeared to be expected to perform a wide range of activities in order to care for their children and meet their needs:

Balwinder's interpreter: Mum is saying that mum needs to do everything for a child and it is very important about mum's role that she needs to provide for a child.

Angela: For me being a mother is, well, almost everything; it's being a teacher, nurse, cook, cleaner, you know, play leader, just everything ...

Caring for children can therefore be seen as an extremely expansive concept. First, all the women talked about mothering in terms of caring for their children's 'basic' or physiological needs, i.e. ensuring that their children were sheltered, fed, cleaned and clothed. In addition, it seemed that women are expected to care for their children's emotional needs, which included being present for their children, spending time with them and listening to them. In this regard, the concept of 'maternal love' was also important and the women were expected to show their children that they loved them:

Lucy: Being there for your children ... They are loved ... You know, they got someone they can talk to or go to, no matter what they are going through. Just really making them have a happy childhood.

Shelly: I think kids need to be shown that they are loved and wanted.

The participants also talked about the necessity of women playing and doing outdoor activities with their children:

Angela: Take them [children] to the park; play with them in the garden ...

Moreover, the participants reported that women are also expected to perform housework as part of their caring activities. Although there is no obvious link between the state of the house and the mother-child relationship or a woman's response to her children's needs, the cleanliness and tidiness of the house was perceived as another visible and tangible 'measure' of the women's mothering:

Lucy: The house should be clean, dinner should be cooked; you all sit down and eat it.

Denise: Being a mother is literally that you're ... you're the one who has to manage the children, the house, everything basically.

Finally, the women fell responsible for preserving the family unit and mediating the relationships between the members of the family, including the relationships between siblings as well as between the children and their fathers. These ideas highlighted the influence of the nuclear model of family – constituted of a heterosexual couple and their children, with the women looking after the children and the home (see above) – and of the belief that children need fathers – particularly boys:

Sarah: I believe they [children] should have a relationship with their dad. I think it's better if the dad is on the scene, especially when you've got boys ... I think they look for the father figure. And like, if they are playing up I could say, 'Your dad will sort it out when comes the weekend'. That seems to knock him [son] into shape a bit more ... I think it's good for him to have a father figure.

In contrast, one participant challenged the idea that children necessarily need fathers:

Bridget: Saying it is really important for children to know their roots. And I think it is to do with an anxiety about fatherless children and what terrible things they get up to. Weirdly, you know, children have been managing fine without their dads for centuries.

Protecting children: from what?

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews referred to the necessity for women to protect their children. The participants' awareness in regard to the issue of protection may have been raised through their experiences of mothering in

the context of domestic violence. Nonetheless, it appeared that the need to protect children is not something exceptional or something that is only required in particular circumstances. Instead, the protection of children was seen as being a significant aspect of mothering:

Joanne: To be a good mum? To look after your children; to try to protect them.

Denise: A mother's job is to protect.

Kate: A mother should always protect that child ... A mother will always protect her child.

When the participants talked about mothering in more general terms, they tended to emphasise the need to protect children from threats located 'outside' the home:

Lucy: You have so many worries. I do. You know, there is that much to worry about and, you know, with them changing from junior school to secondary school, you got all the worries that go with that ... I worry about them getting into a car, of somebody hurting them or, you know, paedophiles. You know, there is so much to worry about, having children.

In contrast with the other aspects of mothering, the protection of children was perceived as being both women's and men's responsibility – though the responsibility ultimately remained with women:

Sarah: I don't think it's just her [the mother's] responsibility [to protect the children]. I think it's the father's responsibility as well ... Then, yeah, it is the mum's, because it's the mum that's with the children all the time.

Providing a positive 'role model': all aspects of women's lives under scrutiny

The last theme that emerged from the interviews in terms of the standards that underpin the dominant construction of 'good' mothering referred to the necessity for

women to provide a positive 'role model' for their children. This means that women's actions should constitute good examples for their children's behaviours:

Kerry: They [mothers] are supposed to be, you know, be the role model.

Shelly: I think they expect them [mothers] to be a good role model and to teach them [their children] right from wrong.

Ideas about 'gender-appropriate behaviours' were important in relation to 'role modelling'. One woman claimed that these ideas were rooted in a particular cultural background, but similar assumptions were present in the accounts of women from different cultural backgrounds:

Lorraine: My background, a Caribbean background, it's like the father is supposed to be the head of the family; the mother, well she's got to know her place. The mother is supposed to just deal with the girl child and the father deals with the boy child.

The assumption that women should provide a positive 'role model' for their children implied that it is not only the women's 'mothering behaviours' (i.e. caring for and protecting children) that matter. Instead, all aspects of women's lives are seen as having the potential for affecting their children. Consequently, all aspects of women's lives are brought under scrutiny when they are mothers. In this context, there seems to be no space to make mistakes:

Kerry: They [mothers] should know right from wrong and not to make mistakes and to be, like, role model.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF MOTHER-BLAMING

Throughout the interviews, the issue of mother-blaming emerged as an important theme. Mother-blaming appeared to be a pervasive problem in women's lives.

Sally: If it goes wrong, it is usually the parents' fault. It is the mother's fault.

This tendency to blame women cannot be understood independently from the other aspects of motherhood that have been discussed so far in this chapter. First, the assumption that children are primarily women's responsibility means that women are likely to be blamed if they refuse to take responsibility for their children. In this regard, a number of participants mentioned that women are blamed if they decide to leave or abandon their children:

Kerry: If a mum was to do that, just walk away from their child, it's on the news; and if someone just left their child with a relative and, you know, 'She is this' and 'She is that', and she is, like, some bad monster that doesn't got a heart.

Shelly: If she [a woman] did [leave her children] she wouldn't want to show her face around there again because of people would not accept that.

Moreover, although caring for children was generally perceived as being a 'private' matter and a 'private' responsibility, all aspects of women's lives are brought under scrutiny when they have children and are open to public assessments. This may imply that women are not competent in determining what their children's needs are and what the best way to meet them is:

Shelly: That's hard and, like, when you are outside and people can see you and they don't know the full story, they don't know the background or anything; and some people comment on the way you are with the children and that's hard, very hard, because you don't know whether you are doing the right thing or the wrong thing.

Bridget: On the one hand, it is just bloody hard work and nobody gives you any credit for it. And all you get is kind of being told 'You are doing it wrong' and people checking up on you about various things.

In this context, the dominant construction of 'good' mothering seems to provide a normative framework against which women's actions are being judged. As mentioned above, the cleanliness and the tidiness of the house as well as the children's physical appearance are seen as visible and tangible 'measures' of the women's mothering and are therefore susceptible to providing the basis for mother-blaming. Nonetheless, the children's behaviours appeared to be perceived as the most important 'measure' of the women's mothering and thus is the most likely to provide the basis for mother-blaming:

Lorraine: Some people would say, well you know, putting the kids on the right track, right. You know, don't let them get into drugs and all those sort of things. And, if the kids do fall into bad company and they do follow that kind of crowd, then straight away it's the mother's fault.

Alice: A lot of people look on mothers as, in a sense, to say that everything that goes wrong in life with the children is the mother's fault which is wrong because, as I am saying, in the beginning you try your best to bring up the children as best as you can and how, you know, how – but in life things do go wrong and the kids can slip down a bad road and then you're left with all that problem where you're trying to do it but you can't and then you get people saying, 'Well you should have been able to do that' and it's wrong because some people are left on their own. It's very hard if they've got two, three children to cope with. It is very hard to deal with everything that's going on in their lives as well as yours.

To some extent, there was a sense that women are set up to fail as mothers and that there is little they can do to avoid mother-blaming. Indeed, the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering are so high and unrealistic that it seems to be impossible for women to meet them all at all time:

Angela: I think, what people expect of you as a mother, sometimes they are expecting too much.

Furthermore, there appears to be contradictions in what is expected from women as mothers:

Alison: Sometimes, like, if you're working you get people going on about it, 'You should be at home with your children'; and if you are at home with your children they turn around and say that you're sponging off the state, you know, things like that, stuff like that.

Sarah: I am accused of being over-protective with my children.

Considering the women's overwhelming sense of responsibility in regard to their children and their strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be seen as such, it is hardly surprising that mother-blaming had a negative effect on the women's experiences of mothering. Mother-blaming often seemed to lead to self-blame and guilt:

Bridget: I think women themselves as well. It's like a ... What do you call it? You know, it's internalised, which is why people get such guilt. I have never spoken to a woman who's got kids who doesn't feel guilty about something. I think most women think that they are not very good mothers anyway, because of society and things.

CONCLUSION

All the women who participated in this study talked about their general experiences of mothering as combining both positive and negative aspects:

Kate: It has got its good points, and it has got its bad points ... That goes for anything in life, everything has got its good points and it has its bad points.

Both the positive and the negative aspects of the women's experiences of mothering need to be understood as being located within the realm of the patriarchal institution of motherhood. In fact, these experiences provided the basis

for the development of a rich insight into this institution, which support the existence of powerful ideologies and structures that contribute to male domination and women's oppression. These ideologies and structures appear to be embedded in the assumption that children are women's responsibility and in a particular social construction of 'good' mothering, which encompasses the idea that women need to put their children first, care for them, protect them and provide them with a positive 'role model'. This chapter has also highlighted the pervasiveness of mother-blaming in the lives of women, which needs to be understood as arising out of the institution of motherhood and of its construction of 'good' mothering.

The next two chapters draw upon the understanding of motherhood presented in this chapter, and consider the women's experiences of mothering in the specific context of domestic violence.

Bridget: Although I do feel like I did not do all that I could have done for [child] ... In the situation I've done all I could have done for [child] and, you know ... I probably did quite well considering everything ... It's like that thing, I can see that with my own situation. I still feel here, kind of guilt and stuff, even though I know that these things were happening and that is all I could do at the time.

This chapter draws upon the understanding of motherhood presented in the previous chapter and focuses on mothering in the specific context of domestic violence. The problem of domestic violence can be broadly defined in terms of men's exercise of control and domination and expression of authority and power over women (see Chapter Two). The data gathered in this study demonstrated that the women's partners routinely used the issue of mothering as a target in their violence. Therefore, the first section of this chapter considers the significance of mothering in men's violence. The remaining two sections focus more specifically on the women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The first of these explores the women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence, while the second section looks at the women's experiences of mothering during and after the separation process. As noted previously, the women who took part in the group interviews stressed the importance not only of considering mothering through domestic violence, but also during and after the separation process – and even when the violence had stopped (see Chapter Four).

THE CENTRALITY OF MOTHERING IN MEN'S VIOLENCE

The women who took part in this study reported a range of behaviours that were adopted by their partners in their attempts to control and dominate them; these behaviours included physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse. As discussed below, this had had an effect on women's experiences of mothering. Moreover, the data gathered in this study stressed that the men routinely used mothering as a target in their violence, which is probably not surprising given the value that these women gave to their mothering and the social significance that has been attached to it. There appeared to be several ways through which mothering had been central in the men's ability to exercise control and domination and to express authority and power over their partners, both during their relationships and during and after the separation process.

For some women, even the important decision to become – or not to become – a mother was controlled by their partners. For instance, one woman talked about her pregnancy and about her partner's decision that she was going to have an abortion, despite her desire to have the child:

Razia's translator: She [Razia] had an abortion. She didn't want it, but he [ex-partner] wanted it.

A number of women also reported miscarriages as a consequence of the violence. Moreover, two women talked about their partners' control over issues of reproduction and contraception, leading to unwanted pregnancies:

Sunita: I didn't want to be pregnant for a year. I think he [ex-partner] basically wouldn't let me stay on any contraception because he must have known that, in a year, I would find out what he's like.

Alison: I used to take all precautions, contraceptives, and he [ex-partner] used to do things like put holes in Durex and stuff like that to get me pregnant so that he could leave and know exactly where I was.

According to these two women, their partners' behaviours were not motivated by a desire to have children *per se*, but were integral to their patterns of domestic violence and constituted attempts to tie them to the relationship. For several women who participated in this research, their pregnancies were identified as significant points in their histories of domestic violence, because they were seen as times when their partners started to be physically violent towards them or when the violence became more frequent and more severe:

Sunita: I was pregnant, that's when he [ex-partner] started to beat me up ... He said he was gonna kill me because he wishes I was not pregnant.

Pam: I think I was about two months [pregnant] when I told him [ex-partner] I was pregnant and that was it. He just went ... it was just like lighting a flame. Do you know what I mean? It was hell.

Alison: He [ex-partner] started raising his hand to me when I got pregnant with the first child, and he just didn't stop after that.

The data suggested that these men perceived pregnancy as increasing the women's vulnerability in the context of domestic violence. This was partly due to the potential harm to the unborn children and to the women's obligation and desire to protect them:

Simon: Why do you think it happened when you were pregnant?

Alison: Because he [ex-partner] knew that I was weak, because I couldn't stand up for myself properly; because he knew I would protect myself for the baby. Because once he kicked me and I went down on the floor and I ended up having a miscarriage.

Moreover, several men had threatened to use violence and did use violence towards the children in order to affect the women and undermine their mothering. Some men had also threatened to leave and to take the children with them. These strategies were aimed at expressing their authority and control, but also at demonstrating the women's inability to protect their children:

Denise: He [ex-partner] tried to kill my daughter with a hammer and I couldn't stop him.

In the same vein, the fact that most men had used violence towards the women in front of their children was seen as undermining the women's mothering. First, it sent the message that the women were not able to protect themselves, let alone their children. In addition, it undermined the women's position of authority in relation to their children:

Bridget: Just once, [ex-partner] tried to reverse me over ... I think probably he was trying to really scare me ... And he kind of grabbed [child] off me to put him in the car and trying to do that. And [child] was quite little, maybe one and a bit, but you can still see someone trying to run your mum over ... He [child] was frightened and, well, it is really frightening for kids. I think it was frightening for him, even though it was mostly not physical, it was kind of shouting, that is frightening. And, also, to see your mum kind of, like, looking unsafe is not good, because your mum is the person who makes you safe, undermining like that ... I think it makes children feel that their mums are left worthless, really, because, you know, if you have got someone talking to your mum like that, all the time like that, then it would feel like you can talk to her like that too. Because, you know, it's normal if you grow up with it ... you don't know that it isn't okay.

This strategy appeared to be particularly successful when the women talked about their children asking questions about the situation, whether it was while they were going through domestic violence or after the separation:

Sarah: My daughter, she was I think 8 at the time, she said 'Mum why do you let Dad talk to you like that?'

Sharon: As they [the children] get older, they ask a lot of questions. Why did this happen? You know, my other little daughter she is ten and she said, 'I can vaguely remember Daddy smacking you. Why did he do that?' ... She is at that age now, she wants to know. 'Why didn't we leave Mummy?' You know, 'Why couldn't you stop it?'

Lucy: They [the children] go, 'Well, are you gonna get a boyfriend?' And I go 'I can't see that happening', because I can't. And they go 'But you never know, one day it might'. And they say things like, 'What about if he hit you?' So this is how your children worry. So it shows how kind of, deep down, this affects your children ... And I have to say things like, 'Well I wouldn't let him'. 'But you let Dad'. So, you know, you don't know how to talk and act for the best, because really your children have witnessed everything. So you can't then turn around to them and say, 'I wouldn't allow it', because you did allow it. So how can you make your children feel secure in the belief that you won't let this happen to them again?

In some situations, the men had explicitly undermined women and their mothering in front of the children, but they had also used more subtle manipulation strategies in order to undermine the women's mothering and authority:

Lucy: I would just like him [ex-partner] to stop playing mind games with their [the children's] heads, because he still slags me off and [the children] get upset ... He [the child] say, 'Hi Dad, I'm missing you and everything. Mum said I could phone'. What's the first thing you think he [ex-partner] saying? 'Your mum is a stupid fucking bitch anyway'.

Lorraine: It's like he [ex-partner] always tried to ... manipulate me, with my son. If my son is eating his dinner, he would come in and he's giving his son sweets. And I'm saying, 'Let him eat the sweets after he had his dinner'. And he's like, 'He can eat it now while he's eating'. And I'm like, 'No'. Because of that my son don't want his dinner, he wants the sweets. And I'm saying, 'No'. And this is what it was always like.

Finally, another important issue raised by the women was their partners' use of mother-blaming. Indeed, the women also reported several instances where their

partners had specifically used mother-blaming as part of their pattern of domestic violence:

Bridget: He [ex-partner] was leaving more and more bizarre messages on my answer phone. In a classic domestic abuse way, he would leave, 'I am really sorry and I love you, all I want is for us to get back together'. And the next one would be, 'You're crazy and you are not a good mother' and all the classic things.

In this context, the women had been blamed for both the violence and the fact that their children were exposed to it, but also for a range of other reasons:

Bridget: And [the child] was really poorly and he has never been poorly like that ... And [ex-partner] was sort of shouting at me down the phone and threatening to come saying that I was a crap mother and why was he ill and this ...

Simon: You said two or three times that he was telling you that you were a bad mother. Was it happening often?

Bridget: Yes. And I was a bad mother when he came to collect [child] if I had forgotten to put a ... like if I had forgotten to put spare socks in his packing. Then that meant I was a really bad mother, which is sort of laughable, but not when someone is telling you all the time. And yes, I was a bad mother because of having relationships with anybody, all of that was bad ... He used mental health stuff in a really serious way, like all the way through and I think that is a common tactic. Because I had self-harm and eating disorders and stuff, I had been foolish enough to tell him when I first met him, he would just drag that up all the time ... That meant I was a bad mother and disturbed and unfit and all the rest of it.

Simon: How did you feel when he said things like that to you?

Bridget: I really just began to believe him at the end, because if someone is telling that stuff enough, even if you really don't think it is true, here you still think like it is true here.

In the same vein, some men had threatened to make a referral and had made a referral to social services on the basis that the women were 'bad' mothers:

Simon: Have you been in contact with social services?

Bridget: No [but] it was threatened in a classic way.

Simon: By him [ex-partner]?

Bridget: Yes, 'I am going to call the social services in' ... Really frightening ... The phrase 'social services' was like frightening and stuff and views like that. And so I didn't think they would be good to use and, actually, from things I have heard and what I have seen.

The previous chapter suggested that mother-blaming has consequences for women's experiences of mothering, often leading to self-blame and guilt. This might be exacerbated in the context of domestic violence, where women are blamed by their partners and mother-blaming is combined with other forms of abuse and blame:

Simon: You told me you didn't think you were a good mother and you didn't think you could ever be a good mother. Why?

Denise: Why did I feel that way? Because that's what I was usually told [by ex-partner]: 'You're no good'.

Overall, these findings suggest that mothering is a central issue in men's exercise of control and domination and expression of authority and power over their partners. To a certain extent, men seem to understand how the institution of motherhood operates and can be used against women. Indeed, these strategies are 'successful' because of the institution of motherhood and the ways in which they shape women's experiences of mothering, by posing them as responsible for their children and imposing upon them a particular set of standards of 'good' mothering. The following two sections of this chapter consider women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence as well as during and after the separation process.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING THROUGH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence need to be understood in relation to both the particular context created by the violence and the institution of motherhood. The findings suggest that the idea of 'good' mothering is enduring, despite the context of domestic violence. Consequently, all the women who participated in this study expressed a strong desire to be 'good' mothers – and to be seen as such – even while they were going through domestic violence:

Lucy: You've got to be this wonderful mother; it's hard.

Joanne: I mean to be a good mum, but sometimes it's really hard, you know, when you're in a situation to deal with.

However, the particular context created by the violence had been at odds with the women's desire to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering and the data gathered in this study revealed the difficulties involved in mothering through domestic violence. Indeed, all the women who participated in this research stated that it was hard to mother when they were involved in violent relationships:

Angela: That was hard. I wouldn't say being a mother is easy, by any way, but when you are in an abusive relationship it is harder.

Sharon: I think being a mum knowing domestic violence is, like, very very hard ... I think it's very very hard, you know, being a mum and being around in that environment.

Lucy: I think it's a really hard situation ... How do you be a mother in amongst all that? How? How do you raise your children? I don't know.

Overall, the data gathered in this study suggest that domestic violence simultaneously amplifies women's sense of responsibility in regard to their children and diminishes their sense of control over their mothering.

An increased sense of responsibility

The previous chapter demonstrated that the idea that children are primarily women's responsibility constitutes an important assumption at the heart of the patriarchal institution of motherhood and that women have little choice but to take responsibility for their children and perform the work involved in mothering. For these women, this sense of being primarily responsible for their children was more intense while they were going through domestic violence:

Kate: At the end of the day, if the mother won't [protect her children], who will?

Lorraine: If I didn't do it, who else would do it? Nobody else. Not their dad. So I had to do it.

In the previous chapter, a number of women talked in positive terms about the potential for men to support women and to take more responsibility in regard to their children. In contrast, the women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence tended to emphasise their partners' general lack of interest in their children:

Sharon: He [ex-partner] used to be really lovely, he used to be so loving and protective, but then he just lost interest in them [the children], me and the house.

Sunita: I don't think he [ex-partner] was there for the kids. Basically, he was out and about with his mates.

Sarah: He [ex-partner] used to leave a lot. Like, he would leave for about three months or something like that. Like, if I got pregnant, he'd leave ... and wouldn't come back until I was nearly having the

baby. Then he'd stay till the baby was, again, three months, again ... But all my children are quite close anyway, so he used to be out of the way ... He was always going off like that, because he thought he wanted a life better than just watching, sitting around with kids and changing dirty nappies.

In several cases, this lack of interest was compounded by the men's use of physical and psychological violence towards their children and by their misuse of alcohol and drugs. Indeed, a large number of women talked about their partners' substance misuse and argued that, as a result, their children were exposed to inappropriate behaviours. They also perceived their partners' misuse of alcohol and drugs as increasing the risk of the children being abused:

Sarah: He [ex-partner] gets verbally abusive when he's had a drink.

Overall, that meant that not only were these women unable to rely on their partners to support them in performing the work involved in mothering, but that to do so could have been dangerous and damaging for the children.

Moreover, it is important to note that isolation was generally a feature of the women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence and that this isolation also reinforced the women's sense of sole responsibility in regard to their children (for more details on this issue, see Chapter Seven).

Women's loss of control over their mothering

Just as the women reported an increased sense of responsibility in relation to their children, they also reported a loss of control over their mothering while they were going through domestic violence. This loss of control was sometimes due to the fact that the men targeted so many aspects of the women's lives, which resulted in significant consequences for their physical and mental health and made it more

difficult for them to perform the hard and time-consuming work involved in mothering. For instance, six of the women who participated in this study talked about having gone through 'depression' or a 'mental breakdown' as a result of the violence:

Sharon: It was quite difficult. I couldn't cope, to be honest, I couldn't cope. I was trying, but because I was so weak I just didn't have no energy ... I had a breakdown and I couldn't cope.

Lucy: It's such a difficult, you know, a really difficult thing to do when you know that you're emotionally put down every five minutes ... I was seriously, seriously depressed. And I think it's why I didn't function as a mother, because I was suffering with what he [ex-partner] was doing, plus the depression on top. So he was making me even worse to cope with the children.

As highlighted above, several men intentionally and specifically targeted the women's mothering. As a result, some of the women reported that they were not always able to do what they wanted to do in terms of their mothering:

Denise: Being a mother is literally that you're ... If I said 'in control', that's not the right word, but I can't think of the right word. But you're the one who has to manage the children, the house, everything basically. Or as much as the partner you're with will allow you to ...

In some situations, this was exacerbated by the men's control over financial and material resources. Moreover, the women's sense of loss of control over their mothering was not only expressed in terms of having less control over what they were able to do, but also in terms of the model they could provide for their children. Whilst the idea of women providing a positive 'role model' for their children constituted an important standard of 'good' mothering (see Chapter Five), some of the women felt that domestic violence automatically prevented them from being good examples for their children. They were worried that they sent their children the message that violent behaviours are acceptable within intimate relationships:

Sarah: If that [the couple's relationship] is not going well, then it's not a good example for your children.

Kerry: I felt stupid. Like, you are supposed to be the role model and no one is supposed to talk down to you ... And to be living like that, I just felt stupid and like I weren't a very good mum.

This was seen as having different implications for girls and for boys. In general, the women were concerned with their son's actual or potential violent behaviours and with their daughter's potential victimisation:

Lorraine: To me, it's not nice because, when you've got kids, you're basically saying to your kids 'It's okay, it's okay'. You know, I've got a girl child and I've got a boy child, and I don't want my daughter to think that if she is in a relationship and her boyfriend hits her 'It's okay, put up with it'. It's not.

Furthermore, some of the women pointed out that their children's behaviours also contributed to their feeling of loss of control over their mothering in the context of domestic violence. These women argued that domestic violence had impacted on their children's behaviours and, in turn, on their own experiences of mothering:

Pam: My 12-year-old [son], like I said, he can be a very nasty piece of work when he wants to ... He reminds me of his dad ... He's such a bully to his little sister. Do you know what I mean? He is always bullying her and calling her names, 'Bitch' and 'Nit head' and ...

Joanne: My oldest son went off the rails. He is 14 now. He smashed all my house windows. He's done a lot of things ...

The previous chapter argued that the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering are high and unrealistic and that women seem to be set up to fail as mothers. Considering the women's loss of control over their mothering that happened while they were involved in violent relationships, it is hardly surprising that the women felt they could not always meet all these

standards and that they had to establish priorities. In this context their priority was clearly the protection of their children.

Prioritising the protection of children

All the women who participated in this study reported that they prioritised the protection of their children while they were going through domestic violence:

Angela: You, sort of, try to do everything that is possible to put them out of harm's way.

In this regard, the women's primary concerns related to the protection of their children against the violence that was present in their homes – although the women's concerns with threats located 'outside' the home had not disappeared (see Chapter Five) – and the protection for children could no longer be seen as both women's and men's responsibility; the women became solely responsible for protecting their children.

The women's idea of protection was twofold. First, they were concerned with ensuring that their partners were not violent towards their children, which referred to the men's use of 'direct' violence and excluded the broader idea of children's exposure to domestic violence. Second, they wanted to ensure that their children did not witness the men's violence towards their mothers and were not aware of the problem present in their homes. This concept of protection was rooted in the idea that both being directly abused and witnessing domestic violence could have negative consequences for their children, as determined by 'experts' in this field. In fact, several women claimed that boys are particularly susceptible to developing violent behaviours and that such consequences were almost unavoidable.

Pam: A lot of people say, and it's been proven in research, that it [domestic violence] does affect the children. And I honestly think it's affected my son ...

In order to protect their children, the women developed a range of strategies and all the participants reported their use of multiple and successive strategies. First, most women were attentive to what was happening in their homes and tried to monitor their partners' mood and behaviours:

Denise: Yes, you love your children, but you still have to be aware of what else is going on, of what mood your partner's in. And I think that's the tricky part.

By doing this, these women attempted to predict the incidents of violence. Some women reported that, over time, they were able to identify the signs that were indicating an eventual incident of violence:

Angela: I sort of knew. Over time, I got to know the signs and when things were going...

The women also tried to prevent incidents of violence, often by behaving in ways that they thought would not upset their partners. This also involved asking the children to be quiet and to behave in ways that would not upset their fathers or their mothers' partners:

Razia's interpreter: She [Razia] used to just to cook and clean and she used to try to keep him [ex-partner] happy. He never used to allow her to go out, but she wouldn't challenge that or say 'Why am I not allowed to go out?'. She just accepted it thinking that will make him happy, so she just stayed in, cooked and cleaned.

Kate: It is very difficult, because, unless that person goes to work, you hardly get time to spend with your child. Because you think 'If I don't please him, I am going to get a thumping', so you sort of have to shut the kids off. You know, you have to push them away to a certain degree, to try to keep things happy and sweet.

Angela: Nine times out of ten you could guarantee he would have a drink at a certain time of the day, he would go pass out on the sofa and he'd wake up usually around four o'clock and the first words out of his mouth was dinner; where the so and so is my dinner? So it was like get the kids in, get them upstairs quiet, you know, 'Don't make a sound. Don't wake Daddy'. Get in the kitchen, get the dinner on, get it done, get it on the table. So, as soon as he woke up, 'Yeah, it's there. It's done'.

Lucy: They [my children] couldn't even play in their own house because, if they made a noise, he'd go mad. So I used to take them shopping.

However, the men's violence was often unpredictable and tended to happen regardless of the women's and children's behaviours. During the incidents of violence, the women generally tried to keep their children away, either outside the house or in another room inside the house. This was primarily to ensure that their partners would not be violent towards the children, but also to ensure that their children would not witness the men's violence towards their mothers:

Shelly: I just remember just trying to get the kids out of the way whenever he comes in. I would try and make sure that they were in bed.

Lucy: I sheltered them [children] from a lot of it [domestic violence]. Even when he [ex-partner] used to argue, you know, I tried to make them go off to my friend down the road and be away. Because I knew it was coming, so I would say 'Come on, go and play with [your friends]. Go down the road and play with them'.

Alison: I used to tell [daughter] and [son] who were the oldest to get everyone into their bedroom ... to get them out of sight.

Sharon: You know, 'Just go to sleep for Mummy. Please, please'.

The women's concern with ensuring that their children did not witness the violence also led to the women trying to avoid their children over-hearing the violence from another room in the house:

Sunita: You try your best so the kids can't hear ... I was used to put the Hi-fi on, the music up loud and ... Make sure that the doors are closed. You know, make sure they don't hear it.

Angela: I always knew it was gonna happen, whether I do anything or not, and basically I'd just bite down my lip and take it ... bite down my lips so the kids can't hear me screaming and shouting so, hopefully, they're not gonna know.

Lorraine: Even though you try not to shout, it's really hard.

This concern also led to the women trying to hide the bruises and injuries caused by the violence:

Fiona: You try to hide the bruises.

Angela: You know, hide the bruises ... I don't wear make-up now, but, back in them days, I used to wear a lot and using a trowel to hide the bruises.

For some women, it was difficult to prevent the children from witnessing the violence, particularly when the men intentionally used violence in front of the children in order to undermine the women and their mothering (see above). Some women also lived in small flats and did not have anywhere to send the children during the incidents of domestic violence.

In instances where the children witnessed the men's violence towards their mothers, the women's main concern was to ensure that their partners would not also use 'direct' violence towards the children. Several women put themselves at greater risk of being harmed in order to protect their children:

Joanne: I remember their dad lifted his hands to them [the children] and, even though I know he would have beat me up, I'd still jump on him, trying to protect them, if you understand. In other words, 'You can hit me, but you can't touch my kids'.

Moreover, the women mentioned attempts to challenge their partners' violent behaviours and to get their partners to leave their homes:

Sarah: I sat him [ex-partner] down and spoke to him. I said, 'Look, the kids don't like it'. They were getting scared because he was shouting and everything else ... I did give him [ex-partner] ultimatum after ultimatum, but it just didn't work.

Finally, in some of the more extreme cases, a small number of women reported their own use of violence against their partners in order to protect their children:

Joanne: I didn't care for myself, I attacked him [ex-partner]. So that would take the aggression from the child to me. Even, the child could probably escape.

Sarah: I just told him [partner] to get out of the house and he went to go up and get my [six-month-old] son. He was taking my son with him. So I just got a knife and put it on his throat and he then sobered up very quickly. Because he was not taking my son anywhere in the state he was in. That's when he said to me, 'You're really protective over the kids'.

In a large number of situations of domestic violence described by the women, their attempts to protect their children seemed to be successful. However, the women did not feel that they were always successful in protecting their children. Indeed, a number of women talked about the violence of their partners against their children, but the primary concerns laid with the fact that their children had witnessed the men's violence towards their mothers and that they were aware of the problem present in their homes. In this regard, the women tended to emphasise their own 'failures' as mothers:

Denise: The trouble is, when you are in this situation, you do not know exactly what is going on. You don't realise what your children are seeing or what they're hearing ...

Angela: Even though you try to make yourself believe that, as long as the kids are out of the way they don't know what is going on, they do;

they are not stupid. They still hear, whether they see it or not, they still hear it. But you do try to make yourself believe that, as long as they are out of sight, they don't know what's going on, so they are not being affected.

Alison: I don't think I did my job properly, because I shouldn't have been there in the first place, letting them go through that.

Therefore, despite the fact that the women put their children first and displayed multiple and successive attempts to protect their children against their partners' violence, the women did blame themselves:

Denise: I do believe that it was me. I should have been strong enough to have left the situation years before; but I wasn't. It's that double-edged sort of thing: you're not the one who has done the violence, but you are still in the wrong because you haven't protected. A mother's job is to protect.

Kate: A mother will always feel guilty when she is not able to protect her children ... you will never stop that guilt that a mother feels.

In this context, mother-blaming could be exacerbated by the fact that their children also blamed them. Indeed, the children can blame their mothers for the men's violence or for allowing it to happen, or for staying in a violent relationship:

Kate: They [the children] may feel that it is their mum's fault, because their mum should have got them out and that, not realising what the other person had said to the mother. You know, kids can blame the mother, you know, 'It's your fault, you kept us in the situation, you could have had us out'.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of recognising the multiple strategies developed by women in order to protect their children while they go through domestic violence, which are often successful. Nonetheless, men's misuse of power and exercise of control over their partners creates a context where women have limited control over their own behaviours and where protecting children is a constant struggle:

Joanne: So, no, it's really hard to protect them, because you are so scared. Not scared that you don't protect your children, because it triggers something off in here, inside, so you always protect your children, I think, physically. But, you know, you're gonna end up the worse anyway, because there's nothing me and my little kids could do to stop him.

Attempts at caring for children

Whilst the women prioritised the protection of their children, they did not minimise the significance of other aspects of mothering, such as caring for their children.

Indeed, all the women strove to meet their children's multiple physiological and emotional needs. However, some of the women felt that they had to juggle their children's needs with their partners' demands and that this tension meant that they were not always able to prioritise their children's needs:

Denise: You've got to putting their [the children's] needs and your partner paramount, because it is always the case of, you know, you can tell yourself when it's building up to a big explosion, so you know that you're gonna have a good hiding ... When you're living with abuse, you change, if you know what I mean ... You're more aware of what your partner's needs are and how your children can cope, can live with those needs.

Nonetheless, the women's own needs continued to come last. For instance, Lorraine talked about how she managed to drive her children to school every morning, despite several severe injuries and her doctor's advice not to drive:

Lorraine: God's honest truth, at the present moment you're just none; you don't think about you, you don't think about what's hurting and what's not hurting... You don't care, you've just got to do what you have to do; and that's what I've done ... Stitches at the bottom of my feet, I was told don't drive, don't do nothing, get off your feet. I had to drive my kids to school, so I still had to walk, even though he [partner] was there and he knew that I had an operation. Didn't do nothing to help me.

In addition to the difficulties created by the psychological and physical violence, a small number of women mentioned that their partners' control over the financial resources meant that they sometimes struggled to provide food for their children on a regular basis:

Sally: I can remember going in the fridge and there is little piece of cheese ... I've got to feed us all. I can remember all those things, so obviously the basics I have trying to provide ... It was always, you know, making sure there is food on the table and clean clothes.

Alice: We would live in it for six years, day in day out, the same situation, sometimes no food because my husband at that time was a gambler, whatever ... It was hard, it was hard, in the sense that the situation was where the kids were hungry; they couldn't get anything to eat; I couldn't go out there. We had someone that was gambling, that was getting the money from the government to support the family.

Again, the women had to develop a range of strategies in order to care for their children and all the women reported that they generally managed to meet their children's 'basic' or physiological needs. The strategies reported varied from one situation to the other and from one woman to the other. For instance, Angela talked about having developed an ability to decode the signs in her children's behaviours that gave her an indication of their needs:

Angela: You have to just sort of gauge the twitchings and the looks and the body language to know what the child wants. I found that, if the children were constantly, like, licking their lips, they need to drink. I could tell if my kids were hungry, needed a drink, tired, wanted the toilet, needed nappies changing or whatever, without them ever opening their mouth, because I learnt their body language and I had to.

Alice talked about bringing food home from work and hiding it in the attic, so that the children can eat:

Alice: When I picked up myself and got that job, places that we cleaned sometimes had buffets and whatever. And I used to take up some of the stuff that was meant to go in the bin like sandwiches and biscuits and bring them home and give them the kids. And my kids had to go, it was like a attic house, and they had to go up to the top and eat it so he [ex-partner] would never know. And then we'd still pretend that we was hungry, but I knew my kids got fed through things that was going to be thrown away.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cleanliness and tidiness of the children can be perceived as an indicator of the quality of women's mothering. Thus, a number of participants stressed the fact that their children were clean and looked tidy, even when they were going through domestic violence:

Fiona: In that respect, I was not neglecting my children at all. They were clean.

In a similar way, some women stressed the fact that their houses were also clean and tidy:

Lucy: I've never lived in what I call filth, but I've got lazier through the domestic violence. Because I was so sad all the time, I didn't want to get up and do the things... I mean, people used to come in my house and not know there was a problem, because I did function, actually, and I functioned quite well. And I kept the house clean. Not because I'm a clean freak, not the standard that I am now, but if you walked in my house you'd think I was an immaculate person ... And people used to come in and, sometimes, I would say so much about what I was going through and they'd look around the house and it don't look like as there is a problem going on here; yes, it's immaculate, the kids are always clean and tidy, you know, the dinner is always cooking.

One of the most important points raised by the women during the interviews concerned to their perceived 'failure' to meet their children's more emotional needs while they were going through domestic violence:

Shelly: I used to be very close to them [children]. And then after that [after the violence started] I didn't. I wasn't close the them at all. I just

went on auto-pilot. I just washed them, fed them, took them to nursery or whatever, and that was it... I just cut all the emotions off. I still wanted to give them a hug physically, but emotionally it was just nothing there.

It was in relation to this issue that the women were more likely to blame themselves and to express feelings of guilt. Indeed, several women felt that they had 'failed' to properly care for their children and, therefore, 'failed' as mothers:

Shelly: I just felt that I failed as a mother.

Simon: Why do you think that you failed as a mother?

Shelly: Because the way I was acting towards them, like hiding everything, trying to keep them out of the way and not giving them love. And because I split up their family, that family unit.

It is also in relation to this issue that the women referred to the concept of child neglect. A number of women stated that they had emotionally 'neglected' their children, which appeared to be a statement heavily charged with blame and guilt:

Angela: It's all about the serious side of being a parent, if you like. It's about the routine and the strictness, you know, 'Eat your greens or you won't get no pudding', that sort of thing ... You don't get to have any fun with your children because you're so busy trying to keep the peace and keep the children out of harm's way ... Whether you mean it or not, or whether you realise you're doing it or not, emotionally you do neglect the children; you really don't mean to neglect them emotionally, you know, with the cuddles and the bedtime stories and everything, but I think it is a case of ... For me, it was basically ... You really try not to put them in harm's way, so you are neglecting them emotionally.

Nonetheless, the women did develop strategies in order to meet their children's emotional needs, which included spending time and playing with the children while their partners were not at home and doing activities with the children outside the house:

Kate: When your partner is around the children can't do what they feel they want to do. So when he is out of the way you think, 'Right, we've got five minutes, let's go and do something happy, let's go and get soaking wet in the garden playing with the water ... or let's play hide and seek in the house'. You know, stupid things, but for five minutes that child is happy.

Lucy: We used to go out like long walks in the dark with the kids, just to get out of the house. Walk around the block at ten o'clock at night. They loved it then, because it was out in the dark, it was being big people.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING DURING AND AFTER SEPARATION

The large majority of the women who participated in this study were no longer in a relationship with their violent partners at the time of the interviews. However, most women reported that the process involved in ending their violent relationship was neither linear nor straightforward and the women reported several instances where they had left but decided to go back as well as multiple incidents of post-separation violence. While the women expressed a strong sense of sole responsibility in regard to their children and an enduring feeling of loss of control over their mothering, the findings revealed specific difficulties in relation to their experiences of mothering during and after the separation process:

Simon: So when people say, 'It's easy, you just have to leave him ...'

Angela: It's not, it's not, with a big capital 'N' ... It takes so much courage and stamina ... It takes so much guts to walk out of that door knowing that you're never gonna walk back.

'Good' mothering and separation: staying or leaving?

Overall, the findings demonstrated that the women's mothering and their views on what constitute 'good' mothering played an important role in their decisions to

remain with their violent partners or to end their violent relationships. Indeed, several women reported that they were more prone to remain in their violent relationships because they had children:

Sarah: I don't think I would have stuck with him [ex-partner] as long as I did if I haven't got the kids.

Lucy: To be honest, if I'd never had the kids I wouldn't have gone through it because I would have got out straight away. I think it's when you've got children you do stick.

Sharon: It was very hard trying to get out with four children of such a young age.

Only one woman talked about her thoughts of leaving her partner, her children and her home altogether:

Lucy: I used to think, 'Well, shall I just walk out on the three of them [ex-partner and two children]?' I did think about it seriously, of leaving him with the children and getting out.

In contrast, most women stated that they would not have left their homes without their children, which could be explained by their sense of responsibility with regard to their children and by their obligation and desire to care for their children and protect them from their violent partners:

Alice: The main difficulty was knowing how to get out of the situation and how to deal with the day-to-day situation, because it involved the kids as well. But I'd never walk away and, say, leave the kids because it had to involve them. But it was the hard part.

Sharon: I could run away and I knew that the children wouldn't be safe with my ex-partner. So I could run away, but I didn't want to leave them behind. Because I'm their mum, I protect them.

In this sense, mothering tended to trap the women in their violent relationships and participants identified a range of factors through which their mothering had

influenced their decisions to stay with their violent partners. First, they identified practical considerations. Indeed, because ending their relationships often involved leaving their home and moving into a new home and a new environment, some women stayed in order to keep the children in their home and in their schools.

Sarah: You're settled in your house, you've got children settled in school and everything else, and then the mother and the children have to often leave everything that the kids are used to. And then go into a hostel and having to wait.

These practical considerations appeared to be even more important when the women and their children were forced to transit in a refuge or with families and friends before they had access to a new house:

Lucy: I suppose that you tend to stay in a situation because it's familiar and it's just surroundings and your kids have got their own bedrooms. You know, it's better than going and sleeping on someone's couch and, you know, the kids being told off all the time for what they're doing. Because I did try that, but it doesn't work.

The women also identified ideological factors, which highlighted the influence of the nuclear model of family – constituted of a heterosexual couple and their children – and of the belief that children necessarily need fathers. This was also consistent with the idea that women are expected to preserve the family unit and to mediate the relationships between the members of the family (see Chapter Five):

Sally: You don't want them [your children] to see you fail. That's what you feel: it's a failure if you walk away.

Simon: Why is it a failure if you walk away?

Sally: Because you haven't ... You haven't stuck it out. You know, if you have children with somebody, you're there forever. For it not to work out, that means a failure.

These ideological factors appeared to be particularly influential in relation to the women's sons, and when the women saw the father-child relationships as being positive despite the presence of domestic violence:

Shelly: If it's not affecting the kids it is harder then, because you think, 'I can't get out of it myself, because it is a shame for them to take them away from their dad'. You know, they could be a brilliant dad and then the kids will blame you for leaving.

In contrast with Shelly's account, which stressed the importance of father-child relationships and the violent men's potential to be 'good' fathers, a number of women reported that their partners threatened to use and did use violence towards the children in order to prevent them from ending the relationship. As a result, some women stayed with their violent partners in order to protect their children:

Alison: He [ex-partner] put in my head that, if I left, one of my kids was gonna die. That's why I never left.

For the majority of the women who decided to remain in a violent relationship for their children's sake, it was a combination of factors that influenced their decisions:

Kate: If you are a single person it is a lot easier to get out, because you have only got to think of yourself. But, when you have kids, you have got to think of their feelings and their needs as well as your own ... A mother will always think what is best for the children and if that's staying in a violent relationship because it is their dad, and she doesn't want to take them away from their dad because they idolise Daddy ... And maybe that is the reason, maybe he [violent partner] has threatened her that, 'If you leave me and take the kids with you, I will hurt you and I will get my kids back and I will kill you'.

Despite all the above, the majority of the participants eventually decided to end their violent relationships, and the children were generally at the centre of this decision. This needed to be understood against a background where the women

had displayed multiple and consecutive strategies in their attempts to protect and care for their children (see above), but had then realised that protecting and caring for their children would be a constant struggle. These women then came to the conclusion that it was not worth staying in their violent relationships for the children's sake:

Sharon: At first, I'd think to myself 'Well, you try to stay together for the children's sake'. But my advice to any parent who is going through domestic violence: 'Don't ever try to stay together for the children's sake, because it makes their life worse and it makes your life worse; it don't get any better'. So, to any parent, I would say 'Don't try to stay together for the child's sake, because the children end up suffering in the long run and it affects them emotionally, it really does'. So if I know anyone who has been hurt or abused, I'd say 'Don't stay for the children, because it isn't going to work; you think it will, but my advice is, don't'.

For several women, the final decision to end their relationships coincided with an increased risk to their children's safety:

Lucy: Because they [children] are getting older ... they are not these little babies you can put to bed anymore. He [ex-partner] was getting more and more angry towards them and my fear did come that he'd start beating them. That's why I got rid of him. I thought, 'No I'm not having that', you know, 'I'm not having the kids beated'.

Alison: He [partner] came in the bedroom and poked me in the face, and my 7-year-old daughter jumped in front of me; and that was when I knew it was time to leave, for good.

Denise: I know why I left him; he tried to kill my daughter with a hammer and I couldn't stop him.

Sunita: I left him [ex-partner] because he put a pillow on my face and stopped my unborn child breathing.

A large number of women mentioned that they did not want their children to grow up in a violent household, and ideas about the actual or potential consequences of

violence for children were also influential in the women's decisions to end their relationships:

Lorraine: All I was thinking was to get out: 'I don't want to put my kids through this; I don't want my kids to hear me and their dad arguing all the time'. You know, I didn't want my kids to be involved, so I had to get them out, and that's what I've done.

Sarah: We did split up because, like I said, I don't want my kids growing up in the environment I had to, because I don't think it's very nice. It's not, it's horrible.

Lucy: In the end, I had to put my hands up and say, you know, 'It's over and I've got to get out and I've got to get the children out, because of the damage it's done to them'.

In the fourth group interviews, the participants talked about a 'wake-up call' that makes abused women realise that it is time for them to end their violent relationships. For these four participants, their children were central to this 'wake-up call':

Angela: You want to leave because you know you don't want to take the abuse anymore and you don't want the abuse around the kids, but at the same time it takes something to give you a wake-up call, to make you leave ... Something just snaps in your head and you think you know, 'I am out of here and I didn't come back' ... With me it was actually being hit while I was holding my daughter. She was ten weeks old at the time, and the vision I had in my head was if he had missed me he would have hit her straight in the face. Because I instinctively cradled over her, he got me in the back of the head. If I hadn't moved quick enough, he would have got my daughter in the face and he would probably have killed her. That was my wake-up call and I left the next day.

Simon: So your wake-up call was one of your children?

Angela: Yes

Angela: My wake-up call was one of my children.

Sue: My wake-up call was my child, because my partner actually threatened to take my children out of the bed, put them on the mattress and set us all alight.

Denise: My husband got a hammer and my daughter was begging, 'Daddy, daddy, please don't kill me'. He said he was going to kill her.

Kate: My son stood up to his father, said, 'You touch me mum again and I'm going to kill you'. And he was ten years of age. I thought well, if he can do it, why the bloody hell have I sat for 20 years in this relationship ... That is four of us and it is the kids that make the wake-up call.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to understand that the end of their violent relationships often did not mean the end of the violence and that a significant theme that emerged in relation to the women's experiences of mothering during and after the separation process referred to the necessity of dealing with post-separation violence. Before discussing this theme further, this section of the chapter considers the issue of mothering in a new environment following the separation.

Mothering in a new environment

For several women, ending their violent relationships involved leaving their homes and moving into a new one, sometimes after a transitional period in a refuge, a hostel or with friends or members of the extended family. For these women, moving into a new environment involved a number of adjustments and reorganisations, particularly for women who had to move into a refuge, a hostel or with families and friends, and for women who had to move into an unknown area:

Angela: You're in a refuge or you're with friends. Nine times out of ten you're in a refuge or a hostel. And then, of course, they re-house you and it's somewhere totally new: you don't know anybody, you don't know where the shops are, you don't know where the bus stop is, you don't know where the school is, you know nothing. You have no phone, no contact with the outside world ... You are there in this new big house or flat or whatever, and it is like leaving home for the first time all over again.

For instance, a number of women found it difficult to settle down and establish a routine for the children, which made their mothering more difficult:

Angela: When we [the children and I] first moved here, they had to wait for a school; they had to wait for a school placement. So, of course, at first they weren't at school, so they were going to sleep when they felt like it, they were getting up when they felt like it. You know, 'What do you want for tea?' I want chip shop or pizza or ... I mean, when we first moved in, I didn't have a cooker either so we were living on like ... toasted sandwiches and stuff like pot-noodles.

Relocating the children in new schools appeared to be a particularly important concern for the women:

Lucy: The only reason women go back into domestic violence is because it's what they know and the unknown is more frightening. You know, 'Where will I land up? What kind of property will I land up in? Will I work again? Will my kids go back to school? I've got to go through all that upheaval, you know, new school, new uniforms ...' There's too much for a woman to absorb, being a mother. You know, it's better to be at home.

In addition, ending their relationships and leaving their homes often involved a significant loss in terms of material and financial resources, which sometimes made it more difficult for the women to meet some of the needs of their children:

Lucy: Financially, you know, there is not two lots of money coming in the house, it's down to one. And the boys, they are not spoiled, but kids want what they want, don't they? Kids don't think about how much things cost, they just ask for what they want.

Joanne: It's very hard to make the break and stick to it, because, I mean, I made the break before with their dad ... and why have I gone back? It took me to come all the way down here ... Because you see what the children are going through. He [their father] had loads of money; I had nothing when we came here, we had nothing. All we had was our bags. So to leave that, you know, they lost all their games, we left everything. So I felt sorry for the kids. So it would be easier to go back to their father rather than stay where we were.

Overall, these difficulties were more likely to affect the women who had been in Britain for a relatively short period of time, as these women reported a more limited social network and a lack of information regarding avoidable services. For Balwinder and Razia, this was exemplified by the fact that they spoke little or no English and that their immigration status did not give them access to child or housing benefits, which meant that they had to stay in refuges for several years. These women talked about their desire to have a place on their own with their children:

Balwinder's translator: She [Balwinder] said that they [the refuge workers] were quite helpful in the refuge ... She did some courses, a computer course, a personal development course, some English classes ... She is just hoping that her immigration gets sorted out now that she has applied for housing and that is what she is hoping for now, because she is on the last run on her immigration case.

Razia's translator: She [Razia] was very happy when she came here [to the refuge] ... She was just saying that now she is wanting a house and the children should have a right to a house ... Mum said that the Council says she hasn't got a right to housing, but she is saying she thinks that, because the children were born here, they should have a right to housing.

In addition to these difficulties, several women found it difficult when they saw that their children were unhappy in their new environment. This was particularly important in Lorraine's account, when she talked about her children moving from 'heaven into hell':

Lorraine: My two boys didn't like it ... I didn't like it. But it was like coming out of ... This is gonna sound weird, but it's like coming out of heaven into hell ... Because, my kids, that was their home, that was a family house. It's like that was their heaven. And where I moved into – it was like it was hell. Well, it was hell for the kids, but it was heaven for me ... I felt for them [my children]. I did feel for them, but there was nothing else. I mean there was nothing else I could do.

In some situations, the children's unhappiness was exemplified by the fact that they missed their fathers. In this regard, some of the women reported that they were simultaneously blamed by their children and by their ex-partners:

Lucy: I get, you know, 'It's your fault we don't have a dad. And it's your fault we've getting divorced' ... I get all of that at the moment, but I just let them ... I just let them [children] say it, because they need to say it at the moment. It hurts, but I let them say it. I don't get angry with them.

Managing father-child contact and dealing with post-separation violence

As mentioned above, a significant theme that emerged in relation to the women's experiences of mothering during and after the separation process referred to the necessity of dealing with post-separation violence, as the majority of the participants had experienced post-separation violence. It appeared that father-child contact often provided men with opportunities to perpetuate their exercise of control and domination over their partners and the women reported several instances where violence was used against them in these circumstances. In fact, a number of women argued that their ex-partners' real motivation was not to maintain a relationship with their children, but to maintain their control over them:

Bridget: [ex-partner] was phoning up and asking [child] where I am and what I am doing. And, you know, this is minor stuff, but it's still really ... Recently, [ex-partner] phoned up and told him that I was naughty. He was trying to get information about me and sort of find what I was doing.

In this regard, a number of women questioned the potential of violent men to be 'good' fathers and were not in favour of father-child contact:

Bridget: I feel like I certainly shouldn't have to see [ex-partner] again, ever, and I feel like ... I don't know if this sounds really radical and hard,

but I do feel like if men had, or anyone has been abusive to somebody's mum or ... Then really they have lost the right to see the child, because it is more their right to see the child rather than the child's right to see them. That is how it works. And, you know, if they have reformed, at least they should have to prove it somehow ... If it wasn't somebody's mum or whatever, if it was a man who was ... abusing someone else or like hitting someone else or raping someone else or any of the things ... or harassing someone else, people wouldn't get them to look after the children ... You really wouldn't get a rapist babysitting, it should be as simple as that.

However, several women reported that their children missed their fathers after the separation:

Sarah: My two youngest were the ones that were upset the most when I kicked him [ex-partner] out, because they wanted their dad.

Lucy: Trying to raise the children in that is just a nightmare, because, you know, I've got the house quiet now, where he [ex-partner] is not there and the abuse is not going on. And it is nice and peaceful. But the boys are finding it lonely, because they're used to all his mayhem going on. And they say things like, they don't like this, it's too quiet. They want Daddy back. I'm spiteful for not letting Daddy come back. So, you know, you try to cope with making it right for them, but you've got these kids having a go at you for trying to make it right. So you feel like you're not winning anything!

Consequently, the majority of the women did not wish to stop the contact that their children had with their fathers:

Sarah: I've never stopped him [ex-partner] from seeing the children. The only way I'd stop him is if he's drunk, there's no way.

In fact, the women often encouraged the continuation of the relationships between their children and their fathers. This position appeared to be influenced by their children's desire to see their father, but also by the belief that the father figure is important for children, particularly boys (see Chapter Five). Whether the men used

violence during contact or in other circumstances, a number of women found it difficult to care for their children in the context of post-separation violence:

Bridget: I found it really difficult to look after [my child] and have enough, kind of, emotional energy for him, because I was having to deal with phone calls throughout the day and [ex-partner] coming around and shouting and coming in my house and not going and all that kind of thing. And it was very exhausting and I spent a lot of time placating [ex-partner] ... We just didn't have a routine, because [ex-partner] would just come and disrupt everything.

Moreover, several women stress the importance for them of continuing to protect their children from their ex-partners' violence:

Sarah: It seemed to go alright after, but the kids started questioning, 'Why do you [Dad] shout at Mummy when you come down? Why are you talking to Mummy like that?' And it shouldn't be like that, especially when you broke up as well and he is only seeing them [the children] at weekends. And then he is just giving me a lot of verbal. It's not fair on them; it's supposed to be their time with him, not him standing there rowing with me over something stupid. But I think a lot of it does push off on the kids.

In this regard, a number of women mentioned that the strategies they had developed in order to protect their children while they were going through domestic violence no longer worked in the context of post-separation violence. This was because they felt that they were less able to know what their ex-partners' behaviours were and had less control over those behaviours, particularly during father-child contact:

Alison: When we [ex-partner and I] were living together, at least I could monitor that, you know, and stop it. But with him living separately and my children being ... I don't know what the heck he's saying; and that's what I'm worried about.

Sarah: He [ex-partner] drinks, so that is why he don't see him that often. Because I won't let him come around when he's had a drink ... I'd rather them go out happy and come back happy. But, with him, it's

just football and his cans and his mates ... And I don't want my kids seeing him like that.

In addition, several men were unreliable in relation to father-child contacts, which had negative consequences for the children. Again, it was the women who had to deal with the consequences of their ex-partners' behaviours and they were sometimes blamed by their children in these circumstances:

Sarah: 'And it's your fault Daddy isn't coming on this one'. Because that's what you get, they blame you then, because they need to lash out because Daddy hasn't come forward.

Several women also raised concerns regarding their children's behaviours when they came back from a contact visit with their fathers:

Angela: They [children] come home and they're, like, so naughty. 'Time to go to bed now'. 'Can we watch TV?' 'Maybe ten minutes', you know. 'Dad he lets us watch TV'. 'Well I am not your dad.' 'Dad do this', 'Dad do that' ... And I have that for days when they see him because, basically, he just lets them have whatever they want.

Bridget: When he [child] has had contact with [ex-partner], he has still enjoyed it, he's, like, much more, kind of, not disturbed, but his behaviour has been dodgy when he has come back. He has been crying and trying to work things out, so I know his dad talks to him a lot and he gets quite irate and says things about me.

Therefore, a large number of women perceived a tension created by, on the one hand, the dominant ideas about father-child relationships and the children's desire to see their fathers and, on the other hand, the risk to the children's safety and well-being. In order to deal with this tension, the women developed a range of strategies to protect their children. For instance, some women established rules in relation to contact and would not allow the contact visits to take place if these rules were not respected:

Angela: When he [ex-partner] does have them, it's a proviso of mine that he has somebody else there at all times, that he is never alone with the children.

Some women had also reached out for support from their informal social networks, for them to play an intermediary role between them and their ex-partners or to take charge of the handovers or supervised contact (for more details, see Chapter Seven).

Dealing with the consequences of violence for children

After separation, the majority of the participants had to deal with the consequences for their children of past and actual violence, regardless of the presence of post-separation violence:

Lucy: And then, you know, it's not over when you're out. You've got all the pieces to pick up and the emotions you're going through ...

For several women, consequences appeared to be almost inevitable for children who have been exposed to domestic violence:

Lucy: What about these damaged children? Because they all, the children grow up to be on drugs and in prison and all that, a lot of time when they look back into their lives, they come from domestic violence.

Sally: I think the kids get lost in it all. And then you're gonna have adults who are going to be abused or become abusers.

Amongst these consequences, the children's violent behaviours appeared to be the most difficult to deal with for the women:

Alison: They [the children] would mimic it with each other ... I bought my son a plastic cricket set and he got the cricket set and hit it over his older brother's back. And, actually, he got a little tiny wooden one and he hit his brother that hard with it that it snapped. So I had to

confiscate anything like that, because they had little golf sets and things like that, and they used to hit each other.

As a result, several women tried to talk with their children about the situation of domestic violence. However, they reported that it was sometimes difficult to find the right balance regarding what they should tell the children about their father's violent behaviours and this was particularly difficult when the children maintained a relationship with their fathers:

Sharon: I think for any parent it is very very hard when they've got children, because you don't know what to say to the children.

Although several women suggested that their children's behavioural problems were the consequences of the men's violence, a large proportion of the participants did blame themselves for these problems. Consequently, these women made attempts to compensate or 'make up' for the situation that their children had to go through:

Sunita: I tend to give them [my children] a lot of love as well, constantly hugging them, constantly kissing. I know they're lads but I do, you know, and I constantly say to them, 'I love you. You're my life and I think the world of you.' And I tell them. All the time I give them compliments to build up their self-esteem. Like I tell them when they're really good at something, they bring a certificate in from school ... I suppose I'm a bit over the top about things; except of just saying, 'Ah, well done', I'd go 'You're great, you're such a clever boy.'

Mothering in the aftermath of domestic violence: mothering under the 'Sword of Damocles'?

The majority of the women who participated in this study reported more positive experiences of mothering after the separation:

Lorraine: My relationship with my kids now, it's better, it's a lot better, because at least I've got the time ... For example, when I was

living with the kids' dad, I never had the time for my youngest son to sit down to help him with his homework; my mind wasn't there. When I moved out and I moved to this flat, I couldn't help him with his homework, because my mind wasn't there; I wasn't really settled. Now, I help my son with his homework, his spelling, Maths ... You name it, everything.

Angela: Stepping back and looking at myself, what I do with them, you know – like taking them to the park and putting them on the swing and rolling them on the floor and getting attacked by the dog while you're trying to play with the kids, clearing up messy chocolate finger prints on the TV.

For a number of women, the end of the relationship ultimately led to the end of the violence, and some of these women no longer had contact with their ex-partners at the time of the interviews. Other women also continued to have contact with their ex-partners for the sake of the children, in situations where father-child contact did not lead to the men using violence.

However, there was a sense that the women could never feel totally free. When they were no longer in contact with their ex-partners, there was always the possibility that they might come back to initiate contact with their children. When there was father-child contact, there was a feeling of suspicion as to whether or not their violent behaviour would start again. Furthermore, because the consequences of violence for children were often perceived as being unavoidable, several women wondered at what moment their children would start to display problematic behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the ideologies and structures that constitute the patriarchal institution of motherhood are often seen as being universal (see Chapter Five), the findings

presented in this chapter demonstrate the importance of taking into account the specific context in which mothering takes place – in this case domestic violence.

Overall, the findings show that domestic violence creates a difficult context for mothering: women's sense of responsibility with regard to their children appears to be exacerbated, yet their sense of control over their mothering is typically diminished. Nevertheless, it is important not to undermine the multiple and successive strategies that women develop in order to protect and care for their children. The findings that have been presented in this chapter suggest that women strive to meet the standards that underpin the social construction of 'good' mothering and that their strategies often appear to be successful.

Because of the interaction between the particular context created by domestic violence and the broader ideologies and structures that constitute the patriarchal institution of motherhood, mother-blaming appears to be a pervasive problem in women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. While both men and children blame women, women also tend to blame themselves and often feel that they have 'failed to protect' their children or that they have 'neglected' them; this seems to be particularly significant in relation to the care of their children's emotional needs.

Considering the difficulties faced by women in terms of mothering in the context of domestic violence, there appears to be scope for supporting women through these experiences. The next chapter focuses on this issue.

CHAPTER SEVEN SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCES OF
MOTHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Angela: When you're in a violent situation ... and when you reach out for that help because you've finally realised that you need help and you reach out for somebody to help you and the person you're asking for that help turns around to be just another side of the coin, so to speak. I think, in some circumstances, that's why a lot of women just go, 'Forget it' and go back. Because you go and, you know, you pour your heart out and you ask for this help, just to be belittled and chastised for something that is not necessarily your own fault. It's, you know, circumstances beyond your control.

This chapter draws upon the experiences of the women who participated in the research that is reported here and focuses on the issue of support for women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The findings presented in the previous chapter raised the issue of support, and the data gathered in this study demonstrated that the women were able to define positive support and to identify instances where they had been provided with it, by either their informal social networks or by voluntary or statutory services. However, their experiences more often tended to emphasise the failure of such support to materialise.

The findings presented in this chapter were not intended to provide a 'snap shot' of current provisions or an evaluation of the services currently available in Britain, as the women who participated in this research had been in contact with a range of services over a considerable period of time (for evaluations of the domestic violence services available in Britain, see Humphreys *et al.* 2000; Taylor-Browne 2001; Hester and Westmarland 2005). Nevertheless, these findings highlight a number of themes that emerged from the interviews, which demonstrate the ways in which the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood

influenced the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks as well as with voluntary and statutory services.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section considers the women's definitions of what positive support is in terms of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The following three sections consider significant themes that emerged from the interviews, that can explain why such support often failed to materialise. The first of these sections highlights the barriers that prevented the women from reaching out for support. The second section addresses the general lack of attention that was given to the issue of mothering by the women's informal social networks and by voluntary and statutory services. The final section discusses the tendency to focus on the women's 'failures' as mothers, particularly in statutory services.

WHAT CONSTITUTES POSITIVE SUPPORT?

Despite the important diversity amongst the participants, the data gathered in this study demonstrated a high level of consistency in the women's definitions of what positive support was – or could have been – in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Clearly, providing support for women in their own right is likely to have a positive effect on their experiences of mothering, but the participants did identify a number of issues of support that related specifically to their experiences of mothering; these issues are examined in this chapter.

Considering the difficulties that were identified in the previous chapter, all the participants recognised that there was scope for such support. However, there was

a sense that the support that could be provided to women in relation to their mothering was limited, as long as they were living with their violent partners:

Lorraine: While you are still in this abusive relationship, there is no help. The only help you can get is by removing the perpetrator, it's the only help. It's only until the perpetrator is out, out of the picture, you can get help.

Nonetheless, several women stressed the relevance of practical and material support, both while they were going through domestic violence and during and after the separation process. Practical support was often defined in terms of having someone who could look after the children from time to time. For most women such support was provided by relatives or friends, but it could also be provided by statutory social services:

Alison: While all this [the domestic violence] was going on, if it wasn't for my social worker and all the people that used to help by looking after my children for a few hours to give me a couple of hours break or what have you, I don't know how I'd have got through, I really don't.

Pam: They [social services] used to have certain social worker type people, trainees, things like that, and they would take them [the children] out, even if it's out to the park and have a game of footie with them, things like that.

Considering the financial difficulties that were faced by some of the participants while they were going through domestic violence (see Chapter Six), the availability of material support was sometimes crucial for them to be able to care for their children's 'basic' needs. Again, this could be provided by the women's informal social networks:

Sunita: I've got an older brother and he goes, 'Do you need any money for the shop or for anything? I'll send you food and everything'. My mum cooks curries, she sends that to me ... My kids can never open a cupboard and say there is nothing there.

Material support could also be provided by statutory social services:

Alison: There was times, I mean, I had one nappy, one last bottle of milk for my son and my husband had got £140 odd in his pocket, which most of that was for the kids ... If it wasn't for the [social workers] then, I wouldn't have got, like, bits of money to get the electric, food ... They gave me food parcels, nappies, things like that.

Pam: When my partner had come home and had spent all the wages, I'd have to go to socials services and they'd get me boxes of food and stuff, they were absolutely brilliant.

On certain occasions, material support was not crucial for the women to be able to care for their children, but it could still make a positive difference in the women's and the children's lives. For instance, Alison talked in really positive terms about the food and the presents that were delivered to her and her children on Christmas Eve:

Alison: There was one Christmas, I had nothing and they turned up on the doorstep with a big black bag of toys, as presents for my kids and a food parcel and a turkey, on Christmas Eve. I could not believe my eyes, I could not believe it. And the presents wasn't even cheap presents, they were proper expensive, some of them expensive presents, for all my kids.

Most women reported that it was often when they decided to put an end to their violent relationships that assistance was most needed. As discussed in the previous chapter, ending a violent relationship often involved that the women and the children had to leave their home and in these circumstances, they generally required help in finding a safe place for them to stay. In this regard, several participants had stayed with relatives and friends, generally for a relatively short period of time:

Alison: I left then. I went to me mum's for a couple of days with the kids. And then my mum said, because she was only living in a one-bedroom place, so I had to go home. But what I did was I asked my sister, she'd just moved into a new place down the – out here at the time, to a three-bedroom place and she only got the one child. I

said, 'I know it's a lot to ask, but could you put us up for at least a week, and if I don't find nowhere for the council to swap me into another house I will go to a hostel'. So I stayed at my sister's for a week. And then she said that she couldn't put up with all of us, because there were five of us. And then I was gonna go home, but my uncle lives a couple of doors down and he put us up for about two weeks before I got my house.

Several participants had also stayed in refuges, for periods of time ranging from a few days up to three years. While staying with friends and relatives and staying in refuges were generally practical and relatively safe options, most women found it difficult to mother in these contexts (see below), and being provided with a place on their own was seen as being a more positive option. In fact, there was broad agreement amongst the participants with the idea that the most positive form of support in these circumstances would be to have the perpetrators removed from the houses, which would have allowed the women and their children to avoid the reorganisations and adjustments involved in moving into a new environment (see Chapter Six):

Sarah: It should be the man who goes. If it's him that's doing the abuse, then it should be him that goes, because it's not fair on the children, uprooting them all the time ... Especially if they're settled in school, they've got their friends and things like that, that's not fair to keep uprooting them all the time.

Lucy: In the long run, it should be men who are removed, men who should be made to move on, not the women. The women should not be took out of the home with children, she should not be made to live in a refuge. It should be the man and, if he is that violent, imprison the man, take him out of the situation.

Moreover, a number of women expressed the need for support in managing father-child contact, so that this could be safer for both women and children. Some of these women reported that their informal social networks had played an

intermediary role between them and their ex-partners and had taken charge of the handovers and of the supervised contacts:

Angela: He [ex-partner] said, 'I don't want to see you, but I want to see the kids now'. I said, 'When I'll had time to think, I will get in touch with your mother and make arrangements with her for you to see the children but, until I contact your mother and she contacts you, I don't want to see you again' ... Another couple of months later I arranged with his mother for him to start seeing the children.

However, a number of women also stressed the potential for voluntary and statutory services to provide resources in this area:

Bridget: It would be good if there was provision for dropping children off somewhere.

Lucy: I think they [the children] should have access, but I think he [ex-partner] should have it, like, where it's, like, visiting ... He goes somewhere and it's supervised. That's the kind of access I think it should be: supervised access.

Furthermore, one of the most important themes that emerged from the interviews referred to the need for direct work with children who have been exposed to domestic violence. Generally, the women stated that such work ought to be provided by professionals in this field:

Kate: I would say it sort of got to be evaluated. I think the children need to talk to a professional and for that professional to decide how or which line to go down for the help that the child needs.

Joanne: I think a women's refuge should have had that kind of support in it, that's what it needs for children. And women's refuges do need to understand that children do come from violent homes, they're going to be quite aggressive themselves. I know this isn't acceptable, but this is not the children's fault. The children must be taught different skills, maybe have anger-management, anything, because they are usually frustrated as well.

In the interviews, there was a clear sense that providing direct support for children also means providing support for women in relation to their experiences of mothering:

Shelly: To do more work with the children, to find out if it had affected them or if it will affect them. If they could find that out and it had, to try to help, help them through it, so it takes some of the pressure off the mother.

Overall, these findings demonstrated that the women were able to define what positive support was – or could have been – in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. It appears that an important overarching condition for support to be positive was that it did not reproduce mother-blaming:

Kate: We judge ourselves, we don't need to be judged. But listen to what we are asking. Help us.

Shelly: As much as they [services] blame us, we blame ourselves. So you don't need them to blame us, because we are already blaming ourselves.

Whilst the women did identify instances where they had been provided with positive support, their experiences more often tended to emphasise the failure of such support to materialise. The next section considers the barriers that prevented the women from reaching out for support.

BARRIERS THAT PREVENT WOMEN FROM REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT

Throughout the interviews, the participants highlighted numerous barriers that prevented them from reaching out for support in regard to their mothering, both while they were going through domestic violence and during and after the

separation process. While the women were going through domestic violence, their partners often attempted to isolate them and to limit and control their access to their relatives and friends, and several women had very limited social networks to turn to for assistance. This was a particularly significant issue for the women who had been in Britain for a relatively short period of time and for the women who spoke little or no English, as their social networks were likely to be even more limited:

Fiona: It was very very hard for me, because I have no family in this country at all and at the time I had no friends either, because I wasn't allowed to have any friends.

Razia's interpreter: Mum was saying that for the first three years she was married, she never set foot outside the house.

In several cases, the women's partners attempted to limit and control their access to voluntary and statutory services. For instance, a number of women reported that their partners threatened to and did use violence in order to prevent them from calling the police:

Pam: I never ever called the police out, I was too scared. I was really scared to call the police home, because he [ex-partner] would always threaten me that, if I did call the police, that he would kill me and the children.

Some men were also present when the women were in contact with statutory services, including social services, health services and mental health services; this illustrates the men's exercise of control over their partners as well as the professionals' lack of awareness and sensitivity in relation to the issue of domestic violence. As a result, the information that the women were able to share with professionals was extremely limited:

Sophia's interpreter: Even when the health visitor was visiting the home, he [ex-partner] always used to be there with her. So she was quite restricted in accessing services, very restricted.

Denise: Social services came to my door at half eight at night, knocked on the door and said, 'You've been in hospital for abuse, how is everything?', knowing full well that my husband was at the back of me. And you're really gonna say to social services, 'Can I have your help please?' Then I've got a good hiding because social services had been at the door.

Denise: I wasn't even allowed to go to see my psychiatrist on my own, my husband used to come with me, so I couldn't say what was going on.

The participants also stressed the lack of information available regarding existing services that could have provided them with support:

Alice: I said to myself, 'I can't take this anymore'. So this lady that I worked with at work, she noticed that I was sad all the time and one day she said to me, 'Can I have a private word with you?' I spoke and told her and she said, 'Did you know there is such things as solicitors and social workers and whatever ...' And I said, 'What is it?' Me being naïve, because I couldn't talk to anybody, I couldn't go anywhere ... All these years it took me to do that, to find out information.

Furthermore, the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood tend to discourage women from reaching out for support in relation to their mothering, by stating that women should take full responsibility for their children and perform the work involved in mothering – regardless of the context in which it takes place (see Chapter Five). Indeed, this implies that asking for support can in itself be seen as a statement of women's 'failure' as mothers:

Pam: I am a mother and my children shouldn't be on the social services, you know. I am their mother, I should be able to look after them, clothe them, everything else.

There was also a sense that the women did not want to burden their friends and relatives with what was seen as being their own 'private' responsibility:

Sharon: People need more help if they've got children; they need a safe house to go, they don't want to be going like I was from one place to another, asking friends if you could stop there.

Alison: I really didn't go to my mum that much, because, you know, I had a lot of kids. I didn't want to disrupt her life.

Finally, several women were concerned with the ways in which people would perceive them as mothers and expressed doubts regarding the kind of support that could be offered to them. There was a clear sense amongst the women that statutory services might do more harm than good, by imposing on them interventions that they did not want or did not see as being appropriate:

Sarah: I didn't really want the police involved or anything like that, because most of the things you hear about the police is that they come over and say, 'It's domestic, forget it'. That sort of things, you know. So I thought, 'What's the point?' ... And if he [ex-partner] give me any trouble, it's my brothers I'd turn to, not the police or anything like that.

During the interviews, it was in regard to the work of social services that suspicions and worries emerged more strongly – these suspicions and worries were mainly influenced by the women's previous experiences and by the experiences of other women that they had heard about. Several women talked about the power of social workers to remove children and place them into public care, and the fear of having their children removed from their care constituted one of the most important barriers that prevented them from reaching out for support:

Alison: They [social services] can really make more harm sometimes. I have not had that experience, but I know that it happens, you know, make more harm by taking the children away ... I have seen

it happen and the mothers don't get the kids back because they can't bear to split from their partner.

Lucy: Because the abused people are not gonna go to social services, because they're feared. Like, I wouldn't go to them, because I was told they'd take the kids off me. So I wouldn't contact social services, because I don't want to lose my kids.

Notwithstanding the numerous barriers that prevent women from reaching out for support, most women eventually decided to ask for assistance, either from their informal social networks or from voluntary or statutory services. Other women had interventions imposed upon them by statutory services. The following two sections discuss themes that emerged from the interviews in regard to the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services, i.e. the 'invisibility' of mothering and the focus on women's 'failures' as mothers.

'INVISIBLE' MOTHERING

An important theme that emerged from the interviews referred to the 'invisibility' of mothering in the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services, which means that issues related to their mothering were not addressed. Indeed, the findings showed that the women were often left on their own to protect and care for their children, even when they were going through domestic violence:

Lucy: You just wished somebody come alone and take them [the children] for a weekend for you, you know, just to give you time and recharge your batteries and get back on your feet. But it doesn't happen. You know, you're stuck with your children twenty-four hours, seven days a week.

Lorraine: You're just fighting a losing battle. You're fighting a losing battle. social services don't want to help you. Housing don't want to help

you. Who else can you turn to? You've got nobody, because nobody can help you.

This lack of support in relation to their mothering was also expressed by the women in terms of the absence of resources for children who have been exposed to domestic violence, as the participants clearly stated that providing direct support for children also means providing support for women in relation to their mothering (see above). Indeed, there was a broad agreement amongst the participants with the idea that not enough help was provided to children, both while they were going through domestic violence and after the separation:

Kate: More often than not people concentrate on the women and forget about the kids.

Lucy: They [the different services] all should have a unit trained and specialised for domestic violence. Not only for the mother, for the children. So that way, any woman coming out of domestic violence not only has help with her, but help with the children at the same time, because they don't help the children.

Several women also stressed that even when they were in contact with voluntary or statutory services, the issue of mothering was not automatically considered. For instance, several women reported situations when police officers were called to their home for domestic violence, but did not express concerns for the children:

Angela: I had a lump the size of a golf ball on my head, where my head had gone cracked on the table, a black eye, a thick lip, bloody lip and literally god knows whatever it was I'd cooked for dinner that day in my hair ... My kids didn't see it very often, but this was the one time when they did see, because we were sitting down to dinner ... And so the kids were sat there at the dinner table, you know, my kids hysterical at the police officers, 'My daddy is hurting my mummy'. And nothing. And that really I don't think there is a word for how it made me feel, because I was angry and I was hurt and I felt betrayed and so many other things all in one go, by the police officers.

In this regard, one woman suggested that as long as women seem to be able to meet the standards of 'good' mothering, they are not seen as requiring assistance and are not offered any support. In this regard, it appears that the cleanliness and tidiness of the house can be seen as reliable indicators of the quality of woman's mothering:

Lucy: Clearly, they [police officers] could see what was going on. Clearly, they could see this woman and her children need to get out of this situation. And not once did they ever say to me, 'Are the children alright, has he hurt the children?' And there was once, 'Can we check your children?' ... And they've got up and they check their rooms and everything and she come back and she went, 'No, they are in bed, safe, tidy, immaculate room, nothing wrong there'. And they've gone ... So if my kids have had dirty filthy rooms and dirty beds, they would have helped me. Is that what they were saying? So, sometimes, you know, being that good mother doesn't work for you.

Another woman reported a similar observation in relation to health services, suggesting that they would not provide additional support as long as women appear to meet the standards of 'good' mothering:

Shelly: He [doctor] just gave me some tablets ... But there was nobody ever saw the kids, spoke to the kids or asked what they were going through, how it was affecting them. And all they were bothered about, I think, was as long as you fed the kids, took them to school, and that was it.

The few women who eventually decided to contact social services to obtain support for their children and assistance in regard to their mothering also found it difficult to access services, even when the women emphasised problems displayed by their children and their feeling of powerlessness in this regard:

Pam: My twelve-year-old son is causing me a lot of stress. I have been on Diazepam and things like that to try to calm me down. He's just going out being very destructive; he went out and he was smoking drugs with a friend. And I reported it to the school and I reported it

to social services to see if I could get some help, but that didn't happen ... I'm too scared now to let him out in case he does anything else.

Overall, these findings demonstrated that the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with statutory services reflected and reinforced the idea that children are primarily women's responsibility. They also highlighted the fact that the women were often not perceived as being competent in determining what their children's needs were and what the best way to meet them was. This was illustrated in the account of Lorraine, who contacted social services because she was worried about her seven-year-old son's behaviours:

Lorraine: The lady [social worker] came out and she said that there is nothing she can do for me, there was nothing she can do for the kids, because I wasn't threatening my kids, I wasn't beating my kids; my kids are normal kids, they've got nothing to worry about ... They expect that a women who's gone through domestic violence, she's gonna be aggressive towards her kids, she's insane. That's the only way they're gonna help you, if you end up beating your child, threatening your kids. That's the only way they're gonna help you. But apart from that, they're not helping you.

Simon: What were you expecting from social services?

Lorraine: I was expecting some help for the kids. I wanted them to ask my kids how they were feeling ... They did nothing, nothing. They just said that me kids were normal, they didn't see my kids as any threat.

Simon: Did they direct you to someone who could do it?

Lorraine: No, I didn't need help.

The services that were offered by refuges were different from those provided by the statutory agencies mentioned above, as they did provide accommodation services for both women and their children. Nonetheless, it seemed that there was also little attention to mothering, and the idea that children are primarily women's

responsibility was largely taken for granted in refuges. Indeed, the rules in refuges tended to reinforce the idea that children are women's 'private' responsibility:

Balwinder's interpreter: You were asking what the house rules where ... Children should be asleep at eight and mum can't leave the children unattended in the refuge, like go out and leave the children ... It is mum's responsibility to look and see to her children.

Shelly: It was a case of that you had to keep them [the children] quiet, they weren't allowed in like the lounge area after a certain time, they weren't here and there unless they were with you, you had to keep them quiet, we weren't allowed in each others rooms and very much rules and procedures ... It felt like you were being punished and like you'd gone to prison, because it was such a strict, rules ...

The participants also gave detailed accounts of how difficult it was to perform the work involved in mothering while staying in refuges:

Lucy: Everyone goes, you know, 'Go to a refuge'. It's not that easy. I've been in there, I've live in one for six months and it was horrendous ... You've got a room like this size and you and your kids have got like bunk-beds then a bed there and you've got that amount of space and you've got to live in there for six months. Could you? ... There is a lot of other mothers in there with their children. These children are coming from an abuse and a lot of the children are abusive ... So you remove your kids from a domestic violence situation, you've got into a refuge, and you're subjecting your kids to a load of other problems ... In a refuge, you don't want to bath your children in there, I didn't, you know, and everything I did I had to bleach all the bath out first before I even put us in there. You can't really cook a meal, because you've got a kitchen again that's about this size, but you've got like six other families using it. So how do you get, you know, to cook a meal and do a meal for them? So you're not keeping your lives kids very normal. So you find that they get upset and they cry a lot and they play you up even worse in there.

Shelly: I felt under pressure. I was starting shouting at them [my children], because I was worried about them making a noise ... And like we had to share our apartment with another family and there had loads of kids and being sick and everything and I just felt really stressed out then. You know, we had to share a kitchen and a fridge and you had to buy your own food and had to drum to the kids, 'Don't touch their food, that is our food' and just little things like that, which were really hard ... And they wanted to watch telly and I said, 'You can't, we haven't got a telly' and I had to get them to

understand why. And it is stressful taking my daughter to school and I had the little one who was one and a half in the buggy. And my daughter we tried to get her to school and I never told the school, I never told anyone and it was just like trying to act normal all the time.

One woman even talked about having been evicted from a refuge due to her children's aggressive behaviours. In her account, Joanne talked about having been left on her own to deal with her children's behaviours, which were seen as the consequence of domestic violence:

Joanne: My kids were quite aggressive when we came down and we get kicked out of the refuge ... And I think they [the refuge workers] could have done a lot more ... I think when kids have just suffered all the domestic violence and all that ... I would like to see some sort of support there, but that wasn't there. The easy way for them to react was to kick us out, which was very wrong, I think, since where we come from ... How do they expect a child to behave if that's all they've been taught most of their life, all they've always seen? ... Most kids that walk out of domestic violence are going to be aggressive and they have to learn that. You know, that was alright to say, 'No aggression in the house', but we're gonna have to deal with this, with the kids I think, because that's all the kids have seen ... So kicking kids and their mothers out on the street is certainly not acceptable, there's got to be something they can do to help.

Overall, these findings demonstrated that mothering was largely 'invisible' in women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services; the ideas that underpin the institution of motherhood were largely taken for granted, and limited attention was given to women's experiences of mothering and to the context in which these experiences were taking place.

A FOCUS ON WOMEN'S 'FAILURES' AS MOTHERS

The data gathered in this study also demonstrated that the women were likely to be seen as 'failing' as mothers, both by their informal social networks and by statutory services. The main ground for mother-blaming appeared to relate to the idea that the women stayed with their violent partners and allowed their children to be exposed to domestic violence:

Kate: There are too many people that will judge you for what you have let your children go through.

A number of women reported that their relatives tended to emphasise their 'failure' as mothers, mainly in terms of not being able to preserve the family unit.

Consequently, they often encouraged the women to return with their violent partners:

Sunita: I never wanted to go back to him [ex-partner]. I could never forgive him ... But my family bought me a pushchair, pram, everything for the kid, everything. And then my mum said, 'For the kid's sake ... he might have changed'.

Shelly: They [parents] used to say, 'You can't keep letting it happens, you can't keep running here every time you have a bad time, you know, you're a mother now and you're a wife, you have to deal with it; it's your little family ... he's their dad, your know'.

The tendency to focus on women's 'failures' as mothers was marked in the women's experiences of contact with statutory services, particularly social services. In fact, it was often when the women were seen as 'failing' as mothers, that they were seen as needing assistance and had access to services. For instance, a number of women became involved with social services following a 'depression' or 'breakdown':

Sharon: I'd a breakdown and that's when social services got involved ... My health visitor came out one day and that's when she got social services, because I couldn't cope.

Pam: Social services got involved after I had my first so, because I went through a real bad stage, like postnatal depression.

Moreover, these women generally felt that they were perceived as being 'bad' mothers by social services:

Simon: How do you think they [social services] were seeing you as a mother?

Angela: Badly. Well, I can't remember her exact words, but she more or less said that I was a bad mother, because if I was allowing my children to still be in that situation, even though they weren't being physically harmed. Because I was allowing them to be in that situation, then I was a bad parent, which made me feel really crap to be particularly honest.

An important implication of focusing on the women's 'failures' as mothers was that it tended to obscure the men's violence and shifted the responsibility from the perpetrators to the women:

Shelly: They probably would, you know, think 'Why is she in that situation when she has got the kids? Why doesn't she just get out?' You know, 'How can she put the kids through that?' I don't know, I don't know whether you're being blamed, because they [violent men] are never blamed for stuff like 'Why are you doing that to the woman? And putting your kids through that?' Yet you are being blamed for putting the kids through it because you are there.

It also obscured the particularly difficult context created by the violence and the factors that might have prevented the women from putting an end to their relationships:

Fiona: Children on the Child Protection Register ... because I failed to protect them, by not leaving my house. I failed to protect them, she [the social worker], by not leaving the house. But I was in a Catch-

22, because I own half the house, the housing will not give me anything.

In this context, all aspects of the women's lives and all their actions were open to scrutiny:

Pam: Being on social services, I've always felt like somebody is behind me. Everywhere I turn I watch what I am doing, 'I can't do this, I can't do that' ... I've always felt on edge.

Fiona: She [social worker] came to my house and said, 'Have you got crisps?' And I thought she was hungry, so I said, 'Yes'. And as soon as I gave her this bag of crisps, she started shouting at me like a little child. She said, 'I don't want you having crisps in your house, look your child is overweight'. I said, 'This is not what you come for'.

However, for women to be involved with social services and to be labelled as 'bad' mothers did not necessarily mean that they were provided with more support in relation to their mothering:

Pam: The children went on to the protection list and we didn't seem to get no help ... Why the hell should these children be on the protection list when you're not offering them no support?

Fiona: They [children] were just on the register for the sake of it. I've never got help. She [social worker] never said, 'come to the housing to see if we can get you an emergency housing in some way'. Never.

In fact, the focus on women's 'failures' as mothers was likely to lead to interventions that were experienced by women as being inappropriate and punitive. In certain situations, social services had threatened the women to remove their children from their custody and to place them into public care. This strategy appeared to be used by social services in order to ensure that these women would comply with their requirements, namely to leave their partners or not return with them:

Denise: We'd split up, he [ex-partner] was in a police cell. I had told the police, you know, what could I do? What help could I have? And I was at my mum's and dad's the following day and I had social services phone me up and ask me where I was. I said, 'Well I am at my parents' house, why do you need to know?' And it was, 'We're coming to take your children off you, you're an unfit mother.' ... I can understand them [social services] saying that they needed my children, because of the abuse at home. But I didn't ... It was all done on the phone, nobody came to see me.

Again, this demonstrated that the women were not seen as being competent in determining what their children's needs were and what the best way to meet them was. This was also illustrated in the account by Angela, who contacted social services for support following advices from her health visitor:

Angela: I went to social services and explained my situation and the social worker I spoke to basically turned around to me and put me in a room and walked in and turned around and said, 'Right, you are going to a hostel'. 'Great, tell me where I've got to go and as soon as I have been home and get some clothes ...' My youngest child at the time was still in nappies and, you know, I had no nappies with me, no bottles with me, no money ... I thought, 'Great, fantastic, give me all the details and I will go home, get a few things packed, get some money, you know, get some nappies and whatever for the baby', to be told, 'No, you don't'. 'Excuse me, what?' 'You're not going back home'. I went, 'Yeah, I know, but I need stuff'. 'If you walk out of here to go back to your house, we're taking your children off you and putting them into care, because you are putting them in a dangerous situation' ... And I even said, 'Well, you know, get me a police escort, one of you come with me, you know, anything; I'll do whatever it takes, but I do need to go home, I need nappies and stuff for my baby'. At the time, I was only in my very early twenties, and been through all of that, and being made to feel absolutely worthless and everything as it was, only to be told by somebody I'm expecting to help me that they were going to take my children away if I didn't do what they said ... In a way, I may as well have just stayed at home, because that was like my ex-partner, you know, 'Do as you're told, you know, or you get a slap'. So in a way they were saying to me, 'Do as you're told or we'll take your kids away'. So it was just like going from one bad situation to another for me.

A small number of participants also had their children placed into public care by social services. For instance, Joanne had her children placed into care following an

incident of violence where she had to defend herself and her children from her partner. Nonetheless, when she was in contact with social services, the focus was placed on her actions, which were seen as preventing her from being a 'good' mother:

Joanne: He [partner] was so aggressive, at one point I picked up a knife and put it in his arm. I was black and blue, of course ... So I was not the aggressor here, it was to stop him. But as it happened, all my kids were taken into care ... I had contact. I was allowed to see them once a week ... Then they had overnight stays, but that was way down the line. When your children get taken into care, they are there for quite a while. You have to really fight ... There is always review, after review, after review; issue, after issue, after issue. So they are there for quite a while ... It's horrifying, because they could have prevented it. This should never have come to this, it should have been dealt with.

It also appeared that there was little or no support available for her while the children were placed into care:

Simon: Were they [social services] helping you?

Joanne: Social workers? Not really no, not at all ... They should have been a bit *more* supportive, but they don't do that.

In her account, Sharon also talked about having her children placed into care as a consequence of domestic violence. In this case, the focus was placed on her 'mental breakdown', which completely obscured her partner's violence:

Sharon: One night my partner followed me in my home and the police arrested him ... Social workers came and I told them everything ... So they thought it would be a good idea for me, because I was on anti-depressant, to get my head sorted, to get my life sorted, and for the kids to go with family. I agreed to that but it was a hell of a job to try to get my children back ... I was allowed an hour with them; that was their favour to me ... So I'd go to all these meetings and they would say, 'We want you to do this and to do that'. And I had to do everything.

Simon: During all that time, were they talking about domestic violence?

Sharon: No. I think they mentioned domestic violence when they were preparing to take the children ... and that was the only time they mentioned it.

Again, it appeared that little or no support was available for the woman:

Sharon: They were not helping me, they were sort of pushing me. Making my life more miserable.

Overall, these findings demonstrated that when mothering was visible, women were likely to be seen as 'failing' as mothers by both their informal social network and statutory services, particularly social services. When the women were in contact with social services, this focus on women's 'failures' as mothers was likely to lead to interventions that were experienced by the women as being inappropriate and punitive.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has applied a closer focus on the issue of support for women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The themes that have been discussed in this chapter demonstrated that the women were able to define what positive support was – or could have been – in this regard; overall, positive support facilitate their attempts to protect and care for their children, without blaming them.

In contrast, the findings demonstrated that the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services tended to emphasise the failure of positive support to materialise. In this regard, the following three main themes have been identified and discussed: the barriers that prevented

women from reaching out for support; the 'invisibility' of motherhood; and the focus on women's 'failures' as mothers. The ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood (see Chapter Five) run through these three themes, and the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services appeared to have been largely influenced by this institution, and by ideas of 'good' and 'bad' mothers.

The previous three chapters have presented the findings of the empirical study reported in this thesis, focusing on the experiences and 'voices' of the women who took part in the study. This chapter discusses these findings and locates them within the existing literature in the fields of domestic violence and mothering. It also applies a closer focus to the issue of mother-blaming, which can be conceptualised as the processes through which women become seen as 'bad' mothers (Caplan 1989; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998; Weingarten *et al.* 1998). Mother-blaming has emerged as a significant theme both in the literature and in the findings of the study, but the perspective adopted in this research project was located within a research agenda that builds on women's experiences and efforts in order to overcome mother-blaming (see Radford and Hester 2001).

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section considers women's more general experiences of mothering and mother-blaming, and the development of an insight into the institution of motherhood. As mentioned previously, in order to develop a better understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence and to challenge related mother-blaming, it is necessary to locate women's experiences of mothering in this particular context within a comprehensive understanding of the ideologies and structures that underpin the institution of motherhood. The following three sections address more specifically the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The first of these sections considers the difficulties involved in mothering through domestic violence, as well as during and after the separation process. The second of these sections considers the multiple strategies that women develop in order to meet the standards that

underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering. The following section addresses the issue of support for women in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The last section considers ways in which women can question, challenge and resist aspects of the institution of motherhood, including mother-blaming.

MOTHERHOOD, MOTHERING AND MOTHER-BLAMING

According to the epistemological stance espoused in this research (see Chapter Four), women's experiences may provide the basis for the development of an understanding of the patriarchal ideologies and structures in which these experiences take place (Frye 1990; Kelly *et al.* 1994; Thompson 2001). In this sense, the findings of the study provide an insight into the institution of motherhood, and support the existence of powerful patriarchal ideologies and structures that constrain, regulate and dominate women and their mothering (Rich 1976; Nicolson 1997; Chase and Rogers 2001; O'Reilly 2004). As discussed in more details below, it is out of this patriarchal institution that mother-blaming arises.

At the basis of the institution of motherhood is the idea that children are women's responsibility. Despite the important diversity amongst the participants, all the women who took part in the study expressed an overwhelming and enduring sense of responsibility in regard to their children, and there was a sense that women have little or no choice but to take responsibility for their children and to perform the work involved in mothering. In addition, the findings suggest that the primary responsibility for children remain located within the 'private' sphere of the family, and that different expectations continue to be placed upon women as mothers and

men as fathers, despite a growing interest in men's involvement in the care of children. These findings are consistent with research evidence that demonstrates that women are the primary carers of children (Kurz 1997; Charles 2002) and that women have virtually no choice about accepting responsibility for their children, while men have more choice about how actively they will be involved in the care of children (Fox 1998). Overall, it appears that such an organisation of work within the family and in society is reinforced by the idea that the actual conditions of mothering are the direct outcomes of women's biology and reproduction, which is elicited through the use of concepts such as 'maternal bond' and 'maternal love'. Indeed, several feminist scholars have highlighted the tendency for the institution of motherhood to present itself as the natural outcome of women's biology and reproduction, and have argued that this enables it to remain powerful and largely unchallenged (Glenn 1994; Smart 1996; Chase and Rogers 2001).

It is not only the assumption that women are responsible for their children that is problematic, but also the vastness of the task of mothering. The women who took part in this study continuously referred to the concept of 'good' mothering, and all the participants expressed a strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be perceived as such. In these accounts, the concept of 'good' mothering appeared to refer more to 'perfect' mothering than to 'good enough' or 'acceptable' mothering (see Silva 1996). In this regard, the concept of children's needs is particularly significant, and it seems that the actions that are expected of women as mothers are all aimed at meeting the needs of their children and ensuring their 'normal' development (see Phoenix and Woollett 1991a; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994; Hays 1996). However, women are often not perceived as competent in determining what

their children's needs are and what the best way to meet them is, which reflects the fact that it is generally the versions of 'good' mothering proposed by 'experts' with recourse to 'science' that become seen as the socially received 'wisdom' (Nicolson 1997). This also supports the idea that motherhood is a 'colonized' concept, i.e. it is practiced and experienced by women, but occupied, defined and given content by patriarchal ideologies (Fineman 1995).

More specifically, four main themes emerged from the data in relation to the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering, which echoes observations reported in the work of feminist scholars in the field of mothering (Wearing 1984; Nicolson 1997; Chase and Rogers 2001). First, women should always prioritise the needs of their children over everything else, including their own needs. In this sense, 'good' mothers are selfless and their mothering subsumes all aspects of their lives. Second, women should care for their children, and in this context caring is an expansive concept. Indeed, women are expected to perform a wide range of activities in order to meet their children's needs; they are expected to care for their children's 'basic' or physiological needs, but also for their children's emotional needs – by being present for their children, spending time with them, listening to them, as well as playing and doing outdoor activities with them. For several participants, the idea of caring for their children also included performing housework and preserving the family unit and mediating the relationships between the members of the family. Third, women should protect their children, not only in relation to the violence at home, but also from threats located 'outside' the home. Finally, women should provide their children with a positive 'role

model'. In this regard, so that all aspects of women's lives come under scrutiny and there is little space to make mistakes.

The findings of the study also demonstrate that mother-blaming is a significant problem in women's lives, and support the idea that women's actions and children's needs provide the main impetus for mother-blaming (see Chapter Three). Indeed, the assumption that children are primarily women's responsibility means that women are likely to be blamed if they refuse to take responsibility for their children. Moreover, the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering seems to provide a normative framework against which women's actions are being judged, and the children's physical appearance and behaviours appear to constitute tangible 'measures' of the ways children's needs have been met and of the quality of women's mothering. To some extent, there is a sense that women are set up to fail as mothers and that there is little they can do to avoid mother-blaming, because the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering are high, unrealistic and sometimes contradictory (see also Caplan 1989; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998; Weingarten *et al.* 1998). Considering the women's overwhelming sense of responsibility in regard to their children and their strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be perceived as such, it is hardly surprising that mother-blaming has a negative effect on their experiences of mothering and leads to self-blame and guilt.

Consistent with what has been highlighted in the feminist literature on mothering (Phoenix and Woollett 1991b; Burman 1994; Glenn 1994), the women who took part in this study tended to talk about motherhood and 'good' mothering in universal terms; for these women, the standards of 'good' mothering were the same

regardless of the context in which mothering takes place. However, the findings of the study demonstrate the importance of the context in which mothering takes places, and the influence of this context on women's experiences of mothering. The following sections discuss the ways the patriarchal institution of motherhood interacts with the particular context created by domestic violence, and influences women's experiences of mothering in this particular context and their contacts with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF MOTHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Over the last two decades, a number of scholars have raised concerns regarding the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence (Bowker *et al.* 1988; Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Kelly 1994; Holden *et al.* 1998b; Edleson 1999a; Fortin *et al.* 2000; Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000; Levendosky *et al.* 2000; McGee 2000; Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2001; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Levendosky *et al.* 2003; Huth-Bocks *et al.* 2004; Jaffe and Crooks 2005). The findings of this study significantly extend the understanding of the difficulties involved in mothering through domestic violence, but also during and after the separation process.

Indeed, all the women who took part in this study clearly stated that it was hard to mother in the context of domestic violence. These difficulties are due not only to the particular context that is created by the violence, but to the interaction between this context and the ideologies and structures that underpin the institution of motherhood.

First, mothering is central to men's violence, and Mullender and her colleagues (Mullender *et al.* 2002) point out that 'it is not an accident that abusive men attack women's abilities to mother, they know that this represents a source of positive

identity, the thing above all else that abused women try to preserve, and also that is an area of vulnerability' (p. 158). Indeed, the findings of this study reveal that abusive men routinely use the mothering as a target in their violence, and sometimes control women's decision to become mothers – namely through controlling contraception and pregnancy. Men can also threaten to or actually use violence towards the children in order to affect their partners and undermine their mothering, or they can use violence towards their partners in front of the children as another way of undermining women's mothering. In addition, men can use more subtle manipulation strategies in order to undermine women's mothering and authority.

Mother-blaming also appears to be a common strategy adopted by abusive men as part of their pattern of domestic violence. Men may blame women for both the violence and the fact that their children are exposed to it. In some cases, men can threaten to or make a referral to social services on the basis that their partners are 'bad' mothers. Overall, these findings suggest that, to some extent, abusive men seem to understand how the institution of motherhood operates and exploit it as part of their exercise of control and domination over their partners.

The findings of this study demonstrate that domestic violence creates simultaneously an increased sense of responsibility for women in regard to their children and a loss of control over their mothering. On the one hand, abused women's sense of being responsible for their children is exemplified by their isolation, as well as by their partners' general lack of interest and abusive behaviours towards the children. That means that women have little support in performing the work involved in mothering, and not only are women often unable to

rely on their partners to support them, but to do so could be damaging and dangerous for the children. On the other hand, their sense of loss of control over their mothering is related to the fact that men's violence targets every aspect of women's lives – and specifically women's mothering – and that the violence can have significant consequences for women's physical and mental health, which makes it more difficult for them to perform the hard and time-consuming work involved in mothering. This sense of loss of control can be further expressed in terms of the impossibility of providing a positive 'role model' for their children and in terms of their children's behaviour, which can be affected negatively by the violence and in turn impact on their mothering.

Abused women's increased sense of responsibility in regard to their children and loss of control over their mothering appear to be enduring features of their experiences, since they often persist during and after the separation process.

Although a number of feminist activists and scholars have highlighted the significance of post-separation violence and the enduring impact of violence after separation (Humphreys and Thiara 2003b; Abrahams 2007), little attention has been paid to mothering in this context. The findings of this study reveal that women's mothering and their views on what constitute 'good' mothering play an important role in their decisions to remain with their violent partners, and mothering tends to trap women in their violent relationships. A combination of factors can influence women's decisions to remain in their violent relationships, including practical and ideological factors as well as concerns for their safety and the safety of their children. Furthermore, the difficulties involved in mothering in these circumstances include the need for women and children to move into a new environment, which involves a number of adjustments and reorganisations in terms

of relocating children in a new school and establishing a routine for them. Such difficulties appear to be particularly important when women have to move temporarily into a refuge, a hostel or with families and friends, or when they have to move into an unknown area. Other difficulties include the need for women to manage father-child contact and to deal with post-separation violence as well as with the consequences of past and current violence for children. In this regard, women may stress that the strategies that they developed in order to protect their children while they were going through domestic violence no longer work in the context of post-separation violence.

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence can be exacerbated by the fact that some abused women speak little or no English, have a limited social network, or have an immigration status that does not give them access to child or housing benefits. These findings highlight the need to develop research that explores in more detail the experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence for women from black and minority ethnic communities.

Given the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence, women often feel that they struggle to meet the standards of 'good' mothering that are embedded in the institution of motherhood; this includes putting their children first, caring for them, protecting them and providing them with a positive 'role model. Consequently, women tend to blame themselves and to emphasise their 'failures' as mothers, and this clearly echoes the deficit model of mothering that has prevailed in the field of domestic violence and demonstrates the pervasiveness of mother-blaming (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three). The findings from this study

demonstrate that one of the most important issues for women relates to their sense of 'failure' in meeting their children's more emotional needs while they are going through domestic violence; it is in relation to this issue that women appear to be more likely to blame themselves, to see themselves as being 'neglectful' and to express profound feelings of guilt. Women also tend to blame themselves for the actual and potential effects of the violence on children; this is exacerbated by their subscription to the idea that children are 'inevitably' affected by their exposure to domestic violence, which raises questions about the influence and implications ideas that have underpinned a large proportion of the work on children and domestic violence, such as the 'cycle of violence' and the 'intergenerational transmission of violence' (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled *et al.* 1995b).

STRIVING TO BE 'GOOD' MOTHERS

The findings of this study demonstrate that women who have experienced domestic violence typically strive to be 'good' mothers, and appear to develop a range of strategies in their attempts to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering. In this regard, the protection of their children appears to be women's priority while they are going through domestic violence, and the idea of protection tends to mean ensuring that abusive men are not violent towards the children and ensuring that the children do not witness the violence towards their mothers. This conceptualisation of the protection for children living with domestic violence is rooted in the idea that children can be affected by either being abused or witnessing violence, which echoes the work on children and domestic violence (for instance, see Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995a; Holden *et al.* 1998a; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001).

Abused women can use a range of strategies in order to protect their children, including: being attentive to what is happening in their homes and monitoring their partners' moods and behaviours; attempting to predict the incidents of violence; behaving and asking the children to behave in ways that are less likely to upset their partners; shielding the children from the violence by keeping them away during the incidents of violence and hiding the bruises and injuries that are caused by the violence; physically protecting their children; challenging their partners' behaviours; and even using violence towards their partners in extreme circumstances. These findings demonstrate that women are resourceful and use multiple and successive strategies in order to protect their children, and that they are often ready to put themselves at greater risk of being harmed in doing so.

Abused women also develop a range of strategies in order to care for their children and meet their 'basic' or physiological needs, as well as their more emotional needs. These strategies are diverse and can include: bringing food home from work; spending time and playing with the children while their partners are not at home; and doing activities with the children outside the house. Again, these findings demonstrate that women are resourceful, and all the women who took part in this study reported that they generally managed to meet at least their children's 'basic' or physiological needs.

While the findings of the study demonstrate that women's mothering and their views on what constitute 'good' mothering play an important role in their decisions to remain with their violent partners, they also appear to be significant factors in their decisions to end their violent relationships. Indeed, children are often at the centre of women's decisions to leave their violent partners, which needs to be

understood against a background where women have displayed multiple and consecutive strategies in their attempts to protect and care for their children, but then realise that this would be a constant struggle. For several women, the final decision to end their relationships coincides with an increased risk to their children's safety – which can be seen as a 'wake-up call' that makes abused women realise that it is time for them to end their relationships.

As mentioned above, it is crucial to understand that the end of their violent relationships often did not mean the end of the violence (See also Humphreys and Thiara 2003b; Abrahams 2007). Therefore, women are often required to develop new strategies during and after the separation process, as the ones that they had developed previously may no longer work in the face of post-separation violence. In these circumstances, women also try to deal with the consequences of the violence on the children, sometimes by talking with them about what has happened or by trying to compensate for the effects of the violence.

Overall, these findings highlight abused women's agency, and stress the need not to underestimate the strategies that abused women develop in terms of their mothering. In this sense, these findings provide grounds for challenging mother-blaming and the deficit model of mothering that has prevailed in the work on children and domestic violence (see Chapter Two).

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The findings of this study provide important information in terms of support for women through their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. While a large number of studies have considered the issue of support for women

who have experienced domestic violence (for evaluations of the domestic violence services available in Britain, see Humphreys *et al.* 2000; Taylor-Browne 2001; Hester and Westmarland 2005), little attention has been paid to support for abused women in regard to their experiences of mothering (for notable exceptions, see Krane and Davies 2002, 2007). This study was not intended to provide a 'snapshot' of current provisions or an evaluation of the services currently available in Britain, but the findings highlight a number of themes that demonstrate the ways in which the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood influenced women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks as well as with voluntary and statutory services.

First, the findings provide an insight into what abused women consider to be positive support in regard to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence, and the data gathered in this study demonstrated a high level of consistency in the women's definitions of positive support was despite the important diversity amongst the participants. In this regard, an important overarching condition for support to be positive is that it does not reproduce mother-blaming. Although all the participants recognised that there was scope for such support, it seems that the support that could be provided is limited while women are still going through domestic violence. Nonetheless, the findings highlight the relevance of practical and material support, both while women are going through domestic violence and during and after the separation process.

It is often when women decide to put an end to their violent relationships that assistance appears to be most needed, as they might require help in finding a safe place for them and their children to stay. At this stage, a more positive option would

be to have the possibility to have the perpetrators removed from the houses, because it would allow women and children to avoid the reorganisations and readjustments involved in moving into a new environment. In addition, the findings highlight the frequent need for women to obtain support in the management of father-child contact, which echoes the work of other feminist activists and scholars in the field of domestic violence (Hester and Radford 1996b; Radford and Hester 2001; Aris *et al.* 2002; Jaffe *et al.* 2003; Saunders, 2003; Radford and Hester 2006). Furthermore, one of the most important themes that emerge from the data refers to the need for direct work with children who have been exposed to domestic violence, and there is a clear sense that providing direct support for children also means providing support for women in relation to their experiences of mothering. This also reflects the growing concerns with the situation of children living with domestic violence that have been raised in the literature, as well as in policies and practices (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Mullender and Morley 1994a; Peled *et al.* 1995a; Hague *et al.* 1996; Holden *et al.* 1998a; Mullender *et al.* 1998; Graham-Bermann and Edleson 2001; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Humphreys and Stanley 2006).

Whilst the women who were involved in this study identified instances where they had been provided with positive support, more often their experiences tended to emphasise the failure of such support to materialise. In this regard, the findings highlight a number of barriers that may prevent women from reaching out for support, as well as themes that emerged from the women's accounts of their experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services. In terms of the barriers that may prevent women from reaching out for support, the findings show that abusive men often attempt to isolate their partners and to limit and control their contact with their relatives and friends, as well

as with voluntary and statutory services. In addition, there appears to be a lack of information available to women regarding existing services that could provide them with support. These issues are particularly significant for women who have been in Britain for a relatively short period of time and for women who spoke little or no English, who are also likely to have even more limited social networks.

The findings of this study also suggest that the ideologies and structures that constitute the institution of motherhood tend to discourage abused women from reaching out for support in relation to their mothering, as asking for support may in itself be seen as a statement of women's 'failures' as mothers. In addition, women are often concerned with the ways in which people perceive them as mothers and have doubts regarding the kind of support that can be offered to them. In this regard, there was a clear sense amongst the women who took part in this study that statutory services might do more harm than good, by imposing on them interventions that they did not want or did not see as being appropriate. Several women also talked about the fear of having their children removed from their care by social services, and this constituted one of the most important barriers that prevented them from reaching out for support. This last point has been noted in other empirical studies (DeVoe and Smith 2003; Peckover 2003).

Notwithstanding the numerous barriers that prevent women from reaching out for support, the majority of the women who were involved in this study eventually decided to ask for assistance or had interventions imposed upon them by statutory services. In this regard, the first theme that emerges from the data refers to the 'invisibility' of mothering in the women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services, which suggests that

issues related to abused women's mothering are often not addressed and that abused women are often left on their own to protect and care for their children. The 'invisibility' of mothering has been identified in the case studies conducted by Julia Krane and Linda Davies (Krane and Davies 2002, 2007) in domestic violence refuges in Canada, but the findings of this study suggest that it is a pattern that is not limited to this context. In this study, the 'invisibility' of mothering can be seen in terms of the absence of resources for children who have been exposed to domestic violence. Indeed, there was broad agreement amongst the participants with the idea that not enough help was provided to children, both while they were going through domestic violence and after the separation: The findings suggest that as long as women seem to be able to meet the standards of 'good' mothering, they are not likely to be perceived as requiring assistance or to be offered any support. It appears that abused women are often not seen as being competent in determining what their children's needs are and what the best way to meet them is (see also Phoenix and Woollett 1991b; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994; Hays 1996), and the cleanliness and tidiness of the house can be seen as reliable indicators of the quality of woman's mothering (see also Swift 1995; Scourfield 2003).

The second theme that emerges from the data refers to the fact that abused women are often seen as 'failing' as mothers, both by their informal social networks and by statutory services. While the 'invisibility' of mothering suggests that issues related to abused women's mothering are often not addressed and that abused women are often left on their own to protect and care for their children, it seems that it is when women are seen as 'failing' as mothers that they are more likely to be perceived as requiring assistance and to have access to services.

Overall, the main ground for mother-blaming appears to relate to the idea that women allow their children to be exposed to domestic violence by staying with their abusive partners, but women can also be blamed when they leave their violent partners for not having been able to preserve the family unit. The findings suggest that it is when abused women are in contact with statutory services – particularly social services – that they are more likely to be blamed, which echoes the findings of other studies in this field (Humphreys 1999, 2000; Radford and Hester 2006). In this context, there appears to be a tendency to shift the focus away from domestic violence and to emphasise women's 'failures' as mothers, which can be exacerbated by raising issues such as women's 'depression' or women's violence. In this context, interventions are likely to be experienced by women as being inappropriate and punitive, such as social services threatening them to remove their children from their custody in order to ensure that they comply with their requirements or actually removing the children and placing them into public care. However, such interventions do necessarily mean that women are provided with support in relation to their experiences of mothering.

QUESTIONING, CHALLENGING AND RESISTING THE INSTITUTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND MOTHER-BLAMING

As mentioned above, it is hardly surprising that abused women express feelings of guilt, and self-blame given the pervasiveness of mother-blaming and women's overwhelming sense of responsibility in regard to their children and their strong desire to be 'good' mothers and to be perceived as such. This theme has been noted in the feminist literature, which has highlighted the tendency for women to internalise mother-blaming and blame themselves (Caplan 1998; Jackson and Mannix 2004; Singh 2004).

However, the findings of the study highlight the need not to underestimate the strategies that abused women develop in terms of their mothering, and these findings provide grounds for challenging mother-blaming and the deficit model of mothering that has prevailed in the work on children and domestic violence. Furthermore, feminist activists and scholars have pointed out that women can actively resist the institution of motherhood and mother-blaming (Croghan and Miell 1998; Weingarten *et al.* 1998). Indeed, the women who took part in this study questioned, challenged or resisted different aspects of the institution of motherhood – including mother-blaming – at some points during the interviews. For instance, a number of participants noted the general potential for men to perform some of the work involved in mothering, and one woman challenged the assumption that the responsibility for children is primarily a ‘private’ matter. In addition, a small number of women raised the problematic nature of the concept of ‘good’ mothering and challenged or resist some of the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of ‘good’ mothering.

Notwithstanding the instances where the women who took part in this study questioned, challenged or resisted different aspects of the institution of motherhood, it appears important to recognise that abused women are often in a position where it is difficult for them to resist the institution of motherhood. This is clear in their relationship with their abusive partners and in their context with statutory services, such as social services.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study that is reported in this thesis. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the ideologies and structures that constitute

the patriarchal institution of motherhood influence women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence and their experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services. As a result, mother-blaming has emerged as an important theme.

The chapter has also applied a closer focus to the issue of mother-blaming, and the findings of this study provide grounds to challenge mother-blaming and the deficit model of mothering that has prevailed in the work on children and domestic violence. In this sense, this research project makes a notable contribution to the research agenda that builds on women's experiences and efforts in order to overcome mother-blaming (see Radford and Hester 2001).

We are talking about *radical* change. And though indeed it cannot come all at once, radical goals must be kept in sight at all times. (Firestone 1970, p. 193, italics in the original)

Despite more than three decades of feminist activism and scholarship in the field of domestic violence and a broad and detailed understanding of women's experiences of abuse by their intimate partners (Pizzey 1974; Martin 1976; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Kelly 1988; Hanmer 2000), little has been written on mothering in this context, particularly from women's experiences (for exceptions, see Krane and Davies 2002; Radford and Hester 2006). The pro-feminist study that has been reported in this doctoral thesis was based upon the experiences of 26 women in order to develop a feminist standpoint on mothering in the context of domestic violence in contemporary Britain. More specifically, the study sought to:

- Examine the experiences of women in regard to their mothering in the context of domestic violence;
- Determine the extent to which, and the ways in which, these experiences of mothering reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood;
- Understand women's definitions of positive support in relation to their experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence;
- Examine the extent to which women report the presence of positive support in their experiences, either from their informal social networks or from voluntary and statutory services;
- Understand the extent to which, and the ways in which, women's experiences of contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services reflect and are influenced by a particular set of ideas in regard to motherhood.

This concluding chapter reviews the key findings from this research and considers the contribution they make. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section revisits the literature and stresses the importance of the issues of mothering and mother-blaming. The following two consider the key findings from this research and their implications in terms of supporting abused women in regard to their mothering. The fourth section highlights the contribution made to current knowledge by the thesis. Finally, the last section proposes directions for further research.

REVISITING THE LITERATURE: MAKING MOTHERING AND MOTHER-BLAMING VISIBLE

A critical evaluation of the literature in the field of domestic violence reveals that little work has focused on mothering in this context, but that concerns regarding women's mothering or 'parenting' have generally been raised alongside concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence. In this thesis, I have identified two general trends in the ways in which mothering has been considered in this field and has influenced policies and practices. On the one hand, the work of radical feminist scholars on domestic violence (Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Kelly 1994; Radford and Hester 2006) and on children's exposure to domestic violence (Mullender and Morley 1994a; Mullender *et al.* 2002) has highlighted the importance of considering women's experiences of mothering and has emphasised the link between mothering and women's oppression in the context of male domination. This work has stressed the generally shared interests of women and children affected by domestic violence. On the other hand, the scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence has mainly considered mothering as being a determining factor in the protection of children and in how children are affected by their exposure to violence (Holden 1998; Holden *et al.* 1998b; Edleson 1999a; Jaffe

and Crooks 2005). The child-centred and gender-neutral approach that has underpinned this work has meant that women have been relegated to the periphery – to be considered solely in relation to their children – and that mothering has often been conceptualised in terms of ‘parenting’ (Levendosky and Graham-Bermann 2000). Moreover, this work has presented a deficit model of mothering, which focuses on women’s ‘failures’ as mothers and tends to pathologise women’s mothering. One of the implications of this approach is that it allows for the focus to be shifted away from men’s violence. At the margins of these two general trends, the post-modern critique has recently attracted interest in the field of domestic violence; this work has emphasised the need to problematise the relationships between women and children and has put forward concepts such as maternal subjectivity and maternal ambivalence (Featherstone and Trinder 1997; Wexler 2006), but it appears to have had little influence on policies and practices.

This critical examination of the literature reveals that mother-blaming – which can be broadly defined as the process through which women become seen as ‘bad’ mothers (Caplan 1989; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998; Weingarten *et al.* 1998) – has emerged as an important theme in the field of domestic violence. Whilst a number of feminist activists and scholars have questioned the tendency to blame women who have experienced domestic violence in relation to their mothering (Stark and Flitcraft 1988; Radford and Hester 2006), it appears that much of the child-centred scholarship on children’s exposure to domestic violence has tended to reproduce mother-blaming through the adoption of a deficit model of mothering. There is also evidence to suggest that this tendency has also permeated contemporary policies and practices, particularly in the statutory sector (see

discussion in Mullender 1996; Hester and Radford 1996a, 1996b; Humphreys 1999, 2000; Radford and Hester 2001, 2006).

Feminist activists and scholars in the field of mothering have argued that mother-blaming constitutes a fundamental aspect of the patriarchal institution of motherhood (Chase and Rogers 2001) and that the psychological and developmental approaches that underpin the dominant construction of 'good' mothering have been particularly influential in the process through which women become seen as 'bad' mothers (Phoenix and Wollett 1991; Woollett and Phoenix 1991; Burman 1994). Within this institution, mother-blaming is so pervasive that all women experience it (Nicolson 1997; Weingarten *et al.* 1998), but there appear to be two main elements that provide the impetus for mother-blaming. The first of these elements refers to women's actions being seen as 'inappropriate'; this involves all aspects of their behaviours, whether or not they can be demonstrated to have a clear effect on their children. The second element refers to the notion of children's needs and the assumption that children's appearance, development and behaviours are outcomes of the ways in which their needs have been met; it thus provides visible and tangible 'measures' of the quality of their mothering. In addition, the context in which mothering takes place and women's social locations are also important in the process of mother-blaming, but this is generally not explicitly acknowledged (Phoenix and Woollett 1991; Glenn 1994). Overall, the literature suggests that, as a context for mothering, domestic violence exacerbates the likelihood for women to be blamed on the ground of their actions – for 'failing to protect', not caring for or 'neglecting' their children – and of their children's needs – based on children's developmental and behavioural problems, either actual or potential.

Therefore, the review of the literature that has been presented in this thesis stresses that, in order to develop a better understanding of mothering in the context of domestic violence and really to challenge related mother-blaming, it is necessary to adopt a critical stance on mothering and mother-blaming more generally. I have argued that this could be best achieved through an approach that draws upon the legacies of radical feminism and that places women's experiences and women's oppression at the centre of the analysis (Rowland and Klein 1996; Thompson 2001).

KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this study extend the understanding of the difficulties involved in mothering through domestic violence, as well as during and after the separation process. These difficulties are due not only to the particular context that is created by the violence, but to the interaction between this context and the ideologies and structures that underpin the institution of motherhood. The findings suggest that mothering is central to men's violence and that men routinely use the issue of mothering as a target in their violence. In this regard, mother-blaming appears to be a common strategy adopted by men as part of their pattern of domestic violence. To some extent, violent men seem to understand how the institution of motherhood operates and exploit it as part of their exercise of control and domination over their partners.

Domestic violence tends to create simultaneously an increased sense of responsibility for women in regard to their children and a loss of control over their mothering. Abused women's sense of being responsible for their children can be exemplified by their isolation, as well as by their partner's general lack of interest

and abusive behaviours towards the children. Their sense of loss of control over their mothering is related to the fact that men's violence often targets every aspect of women's lives – and specifically women's mothering – and that the violence can have significant consequences for women's physical and mental health, which makes it more difficult for them to perform the hard and time-consuming work involved in mothering. This sense of loss of control can be further expressed in terms of the impossibility of providing a positive 'role-model' for their children and in terms of their children's behaviour, which can be affected negatively by the violence. Those seem to be enduring features of women's experiences, since they continue during and after the separation process.

Given these difficulties, abused women often feel that they struggle to meet the standards of 'good' mothering that are embedded in the institution of motherhood. This includes providing a positive 'role model', putting their children first, providing a positive 'role model' for them and caring for and protecting them. Consequently, they tend to blame themselves for 'failing' as mothers. The findings of this study suggest that one of the most important issues for abused women relates to their sense of 'failure' in meeting their children's more emotional needs, and that it is in relation to this issue that they appear to be more likely to blame themselves, to see themselves as being 'neglectful' and to express profound feelings of guilt. Women may also subscribe to the idea that children are 'inevitably' affected by their exposure to domestic violence and to blame themselves for the actual and potential effects of the violence on children.

The findings of this study show how the ideologies and structures that underpin the institution of motherhood also influence women's experiences of contact with their

informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services. In addition to discouraging women from reaching out for support, this means that when they do so their mothering tends to be 'invisible' or the focus tends to be placed upon their 'failures' as mothers – which threatens to drive many women even further away from the support they need. These findings confirm and shed more light on some of the concerns that were raised in the critical evaluation of the literature regarding the pervasiveness of a deficit model of mothering and on mother-blaming.

Far from supporting a deficit model of mothering, the findings from this study demonstrate that women who have experienced domestic violence typically strive to be 'good' mothers. Despite the loss of control over their mothering, abused women appear to develop a range of strategies in their attempts to meet the standards that underpin the dominant social construction of 'good' mothering. The protection of their children appears to be women's priority, and the findings show that women use multiple and successive strategies in order to protect their children and that they often put themselves at greater risk of being harmed in doing so.

Women also develop diverse strategies in order to care for their children and to meet their children 'basic' or physiological needs, as well as their more emotional needs. Furthermore, women are often required to develop new strategies during and after the separation process, as the ones that they had developed previously may no longer work in the face of post-separation violence. The findings of this study provide an extensive and detailed account of these strategies.

These findings challenge the deficit model that has underpinned a large proportion of the work on children and domestic violence, particularly the work located within the child-centred scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence. The

findings emphasise women's agency and stress that women's efforts should not be underestimated.

IMPLICATIONS IN TERMS OF SUPPORT FOR ABUSED WOMEN IN REGARD TO THEIR MOTHERING

The findings of this study have major implications in terms of support for women who experience domestic violence. As mentioned above, the findings show that when women are in contact with their informal social networks and with voluntary and statutory services, their mothering tends to be invisible and taken for granted or the focus tends to be placed upon their 'failures' as mothers. There is therefore a need for more attention to be paid to mothering in the context of domestic violence, while being cautious about the ways in which concerns around this issue are articulated. First, these concerns need to be raised not only for children's sake, but also in terms of women's safety and well-being. Moreover, attempts to support women who have experienced domestic violence ought to move away from a deficit model of mothering, which leads to mother-blaming and allows for men's violence to be obscured and redefined in terms of women's 'failures' as mothers. Instead, they need to constantly stress the fact that the problem lies with men's violent behaviours, to emphasise women's agency and to emphasise and build upon the multiple strategies that women develop in order to protect and care for their children. The findings also suggest that it is necessary to question popular ideas about the 'inevitable' consequences of domestic violence for children.

To consider women in their own right also means to value women's experiences of mothering and to involve them in defining what constitutes positive support. For women, the potential for support may be limited while they are still living with the

perpetrators of domestic violence, but their successful efforts to protect and care for their children sometimes means that they can stay with their violent partners for a considerable period of time before a more direct risk to or impact on their children drives them to leave. In this context, positive support is mainly defined in terms of facilitating their attempts to protect and care for their children through providing practical and material resources. It is when women decide to end their relationships that assistance appears to be most needed. At this stage women often need help in finding a safe place for them and their children to stay and the most positive form of support would be to remove the perpetrator from the home so that they do not have to move into a new environment. Following the separation, women may also need of support in managing father-child contact and dealing with post-separation violence and with the consequences of violence for their children.

In terms of support, one of the most important points that were raised in this research was the needs for direct work with children who have been exposed to domestic violence. Providing resources to work with children should not be seen as a way of palliating women's 'failures' as mothers, but as recognition that women are not solely responsible for their children. If it is carried out in this perspective, work with children can also mean support for women in relation to their experiences of mothering.

The findings from this study are not intended to be an evaluation of the services currently available in Britain (for evaluations of the domestic violence services see Humphreys *et al.* 2000; Taylor-Browne 2001; Hester and Westmarland 2005). In fact, there have been initiatives in the voluntary and statutory sector aimed at providing the forms of support identified above. The findings from this study stress

the importance of examining the ways in which these initiatives are embedded into the dominant ideologies and structures that constitutes the institution of motherhood and how they may also lead to mother-blaming.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research makes a significant contribution to a knowledge base in the field of domestic violence, by placing the focus on women's experiences of mothering in this context. At a theoretical level, this contribution can be located within the tradition of work that has drawn upon the legacies of radical feminism (Kelly 1994; Radford and Hester 2001; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Radford and Hester 2006). This study has presented a critical evaluation of the literature in the field of domestic violence and has identified trends regarding the ways in which mothering has been considered in this field. These trends were linked to the concept of mother-blaming and to the institution of motherhood and thus unveil the process through which women who have experienced domestic violence are likely to become seen as 'bad' mothers.

Furthermore, this study has been one of the first empirical studies that focus specifically on women's experiences of mothering through domestic violence as well as during and after the separation process and to locate these experience within a comprehensive understanding of the institution of motherhood. Thus, the findings provide a detailed account of the difficulties that are faced by these women and of the strategies that they develop in order to protect and care for their children; they highlight women's agency in this context and the need to challenge the deficit model of mothering.

The research also makes a contribution to the field of mothering by developing an insight into the institution of motherhood from the particular position of women who have experienced mothering in the context of domestic violence. The findings extend the understanding of the process through which the institution of motherhood leads to mother-blaming, which has implications for all women.

Finally, this research makes a contribution at an epistemological and methodological level. My position as a pro-feminist man researching women's experiences of mothering and domestic violence contrasted with the fact that most research on women's experiences of either mothering or domestic violence has been conducted by female scholars. Nonetheless, this study suggests that men – particularly pro-feminist men – can develop an awareness and knowledge in relation to women's oppression and can contribute to the development of a feminist standpoint. From this work, it is possible to identify conditions in order for a male researcher to conduct this type of research, including the adoption of an appropriate theoretical approach, the development of a methodology that enables a critical discussion between the researcher and the participants and that ensures that the research focuses on issues that are of concerns for the participants, transparency, reflexivity and openness to challenge and critique.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Inevitably, this research also highlights areas that would benefit from further research. While this study was concerned with diversity amongst women, issues specific to certain groups of women have remained under-examined or unexamined. For instance, more research appears to be needed that looks at the experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence for women from black

and minority ethnic communities and women in same-sex relationships, with an in-depth understanding of the systems of racism and heterosexism. As noted previously, the issue of disability would also need to be given more consideration in further research on mothering and domestic violence.

While this study focused on women and their mothering, the findings suggest that dominant ideas about mothering in the context of domestic violence and about motherhood have been closely linked to dominant ideas about children's exposure to domestic violence and about childhood more generally. This connection could be explored further at both a theoretical and an empirical level.

With regard to policies and practices, there is an urgent need to evaluate the ways in which specific services in the voluntary and the statutory sectors consider the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence. As was mentioned previously, child neglect was a central issue in the development of this study, but in the early stages of the fieldwork women had relatively little to say on this topic and it became seen as one aspect of women's experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that a critical exploration of the connection between domestic violence, mothering and the construction of child neglect in policies and practice is still required.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The empirical study that has been presented in this doctoral thesis was an attempt to explore and make sense of the feelings, motivations, desires, emotions and actions of women who have experienced mothering in the context of domestic violence in contemporary Britain. It was located within a constructive research

agenda that built on women's experiences and efforts, and as pointed out by a woman in one of the group interviews:

Judith: I think it shows what a brilliant job mothers are doing.

However, it seems clear that the potential for fundamental change will remain limited by the institution of motherhood. Indeed, as long as this patriarchal institution remains as powerful as it has been, women will still be seen and will see themselves as responsible for their children, yet will continue to be blamed for being less than 'perfect' mothers.

As pointed out by Firestone (1970) at the beginning of this chapter, such change cannot come all at once, but radical goals must be kept in sight. Feminists have been concerned with developing an understanding of women's experiences and women's oppression because of the potential it has in terms of struggling against male domination and enabling social change. It is my hope that this research will contribute to it in some ways.

Bridget: It would be good if it could be read widely ... As much as this is important, it worries me that it sits on a shelf somewhere in the library ... I think it would be really important to put the findings in a more palatable form, so that people ... academics, but also agencies would read it. And it isn't just for people to talk about!

Domestic violence and being a Mum Questionnaire

It would be really useful for me if you could fill in this brief form.

Yourself

1. Your name? (optional) _____
2. Your age? (optional) _____
3. Which of the following best describes you? (Please tick)

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| White-British [] | Pakistani [] |
| Irish [] | Bangladeshi [] |
| Black-Caribbean [] | Chinese [] |
| Black-African [] | Mixed heritage [] |
| Black-Other [] | None of these [] |
| Indian [] | |

If you answered "mixed heritage" or "none of these", please give details.

Your children

4. How many children do you have? _____
5. How old is (are) your child (children)? _____

The services

6. Have you been in contact with any of these services? (Please tick)

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Refuges [] | CAFCASS/Court Welfare [] |
| Police [] | Contact Centres [] |
| Social Services [] | Housing [] |

Other(s). Please give details: _____

The research

If you would like to be contacted to take part in a one-to-one discussion, please fill in the section below, giving a phone number or an address where I can get in touch with you.

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Domestic violence and being a Mum

Would you like to take part in a new study?

What is this study about?

This study is about **being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It aims to get your views on issues such as the following:

- What is it like looking after children when this is happening?
- How does abuse affect mums and their children?
- What are the main difficulties women face?
- When services like the police, refuges, health visitors, housing and social services are involved do they make life easier or more difficult?
- What kinds of support are needed to help mothers look after their children?

Who will be involved and how will the research be done?

At this stage, I am looking forward to **discussing this project with a group of women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It will help me to understand what the important issues are for women and to ensure that the research is really focusing on these issues. It will also help me to know what would be the best ways to talk about these issues within future discussions with women.

During the group discussion,

- You will be invited to share your views about the research project and how it is conducted;
- You are not expected to talk about your personal experience;
- You will receive £15 for your participation.

After this, I hope to organise one-to-one discussions with some women who are mothers when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend. It will allow me to know more about women's personal views and experiences. If you are taking part in the group discussion, you are also welcome to take part in this second phase of the project – but you are not expected to do so. You may also want to share your personal views and experiences in a one-to-one discussion without taking part in a group discussion and it would be ok.

When and where will the research take place?

The group discussion will take place at a time convenient for the participants. It will take place in a safe and appropriate place and both transport and baby-sitting can be arranged.

Confidentiality

- All that you will say will remain **confidential**. However, if I became aware that, at the time of the interview, a child is in a situation where he/she may be hurt or harmed, I have the responsibility to seek professional help. Whenever possible, I will keep the child's mother informed about this.
- If you decide to take part in the research, you **can withdraw at any time** without having to give a reason or facing any pressure to continue.

Why should you take part?

Taking part in this research may be **an opportunity for you to talk freely about what you see as important in being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse**. It may not make your life any easier, but it may **help other women who are facing similar situations**. It will help to make sure that the services women and children need are there to help.

What difference will this research make?

It is important to find out what women think about these questions, so that services available at the moment can be improved and new ones planned. Part of the study will make sure that main points made by women are given to services and agencies.

Who am I?

My name is Simon Lapierre. I am 25 years old and I am from Canada. I am currently a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being (University of Warwick) and I have previous experiences of research with women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

The group discussions will be conducted by a colleague female researcher and myself.

Have you any questions or are you interested in taking part in this research?

If you have any questions or suggestions, you can contact me on the following telephone numbers: **024 7657 5581** or **079 0658 8934**. You can also contact me by email at s.lapierre@warwick.ac.uk.

If you are interested in taking part in a group discussion, you may discuss this with the organisation where you get this leaflet or contact me directly.

Domestic violence and being a Mum

Would you like to share your views?

What is this study about?

This study is about **being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It aims to get your views on issues such as the following:

- What is it like looking after children when this is happening?
- How does abuse affect mums and their children?
- What are the main difficulties women face?
- When services like the police, refuges, health visitors, housing and social services are involved do they make life easier or more difficult?
- What kinds of support are needed to help mothers look after their children?

Who will be involved and how will the research be done?

Many women have already been involved in this project. During the last few weeks I have met groups of women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing abuse. They gave me their views about what the important issues are for women to ensure the research is really focusing on these issues. They also gave me important advice about how this research should be done.

At this stage, I hope to organise **one-to-one discussions with women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. The objective of this discussion is to hear your personal views and to know more about how you have coped being a mother when you have been living with abuse.

During this discussion,

- You will be invited to share your views and experiences about being a mother when experiencing abuse;
- You will receive £15 for your participation.

If you took part in a group discussion, you are also welcome to take part in this second phase of the project.

When and where will the research take place?

The discussion will take place at a time convenient for you. It will take place in a safe and appropriate place and both transport and baby-sitting can be arranged.

Confidentiality

- All that you will say will remain **confidential**. However, if I became aware that, at the time of the interview, a child is in a situation where he/she may be hurt or harmed, I have the responsibility to seek professional help. Whenever possible, I will keep the child's mother informed about this.
- If you decide to take part in the research, you **can withdraw at any time** without having to give a reason or facing any pressure to continue.

Why should you take part?

Taking part in this research may be **an opportunity for you to talk freely about your thoughts and experiences**. It may not make your life any easier, but it may **help other women who are facing similar situations**. It will help to make sure that the services women and children need are there to help.

What difference will this research make?

It is important to find out what women think about these questions, so that services available at the moment can be improved and new ones planned. Part of the study will make sure that main points made by women are given to services and agencies.

Who am I?

My name is Simon Lapierre. I am 25 years old and I am from Canada. I am currently a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being (University of Warwick) and I have previous experiences of research with women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

If you feel uncomfortable discussing these issues with a male researcher, let me know and I will arrange for you to talk with a female researcher.

Have you any questions or are you interested in taking part in this research?

If you have any questions or suggestions, you can contact me on the following telephone numbers: **024 7657 5581** or **079 0658 8934**. You can also contact me by email at s.lapierre@warwick.ac.uk.

If you are interested in taking part in this project, you may discuss this with the organisation where you get this leaflet or contact me directly.

Domestic violence and being a Mum

Research agreement for a group discussion

What is this study about?

This study is about **being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It aims to get your views on issues such as the following:

- What is it like looking after children when this is happening?
- How does abuse affect mums and their children?
- What are the main difficulties women face?
- When services like the police, refuges, health visitors, housing and social services are involved do they make life easier or more difficult?
- What kinds of support are needed to help mothers look after their children?

What is the objective of the group discussion?

The aim is to **discuss this research project with a group of women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It will help me to understand what the important issues are for women and to ensure that the research is really focusing on these issues. It will also help me to know what would be the best ways to talk about these issues within future discussions with women.

How will the group discussion be done?

During the group discussion,

- You will be invited to share your views about the research project and how it is conducted;
- You are not expected to talk about your personal experience;
- You will receive £15 for your participation.

When and where will the research take place?

The group discussion will take place at a moment convenient for the participants. It will take place in a safe and appropriate place and both transport and baby-sitting may be arranged.

Confidentiality

- All that you will say will remain **confidential**. However, if I became aware that, at the time of the interview, a child is in a situation where he/she may

be hurt or harmed, I have the responsibility to seek professional help. Whenever possible, I will keep the child's mother informed about this.

- If you decide to take part in the research, you **can withdraw at any time** without having to give a reason or facing any pressure to continue.

Why should you take part?

Taking part in this research may be an opportunity for you to talk freely about what you see as important in being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse. It may not make your life any easier, but it may help other women who are facing similar situations. It will help to make sure that the services women and children need are there to help.

What difference will this research make?

It is important to find out what women think about these questions, so that services available at the moment can be improved and new ones planned. Part of the study will make sure that main points made by women are given to services and agencies.

Who am I?

My name is Simon Lapierre. I am 25 years old and I am from Canada. I am currently a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being (University of Warwick) and I have previous experiences of research with women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

The group discussions will be conducted by a colleague female researcher and myself.

My contact details are the following

Simon Lapierre
School of Health and Social Studies
University of Warwick, Coventry
CV4 7AL

024 7657 5581 or
079 0658 8934.

s.lapierre@warwick.ac.uk

Agreement

I, _____ (full name), understand the content of this research agreement and accept to take part in this research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Domestic violence and being a Mum

Research agreement for a one-to-one discussion

What is this study about?

This study is about **being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. It aims to get your views on issues such as the following:

- What is it like looking after children when this is happening?
- How does abuse affect mums and their children?
- What are the main difficulties women face?
- When services like the police, refuges, health visitors, housing and social services are involved do they make life easier or more difficult?
- What kinds of support are needed to help mothers look after their children?

What is the objective of the discussion?

The objective is to discuss **with women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend**. I would like to hear your personal views and to know more about how you have coped with being a mother when you have been living with abuse.

How will the discussion be done?

During the discussion,

- You will be invited to share your views and experiences about being a mother when experiencing abuse;
- You will receive £15 for your participation.

When and where will the research take place?

The discussion will take place at a moment convenient for the participants. It will take place in a safe and appropriate place and both transport and baby-sitting may be arranged.

Confidentiality

- All that you will say will remain **confidential**. However, if I became aware that, at the time of the discussion, a child is in a situation where he/she may

be hurt or harmed, I have the responsibility to seek professional help. Whenever possible, I will keep the child's mother informed about this.

- If you decide to take part in the research, you **can withdraw at any time** without having to give a reason or facing any pressure to continue.

Why should you take part?

Taking part in this research may be **an opportunity for you to talk freely about your thoughts and experiences**. It may not make your life any easier, but it may **help other women who are facing similar situations**. It will help to make sure that the services women and children need are there to help.

What difference will this research make?

It is important to find out what women think about these questions, so that services available at the moment can be improved and new ones planned. Part of the study will make sure that main points made by women are given to services and agencies.

Who am I?

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Agreement

I, _____ (full name), understand the content of this research agreement and accept to take part in this research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Topic guide – Group interviews

Introduction

Introduction of the researchers and participants (first name only).

Presentation of the aims and modalities of the research and focus group.

Reviewing the content of the leaflet and signing the consent form.

Part 1 – Language

This part is used as an icebreaker and aims to obtain women's perspectives on the main concepts used in the research.

When I read or talk with people (including social workers) about these issues, certain words or expressions are often used. Personally, I prefer some more than others and I find some more useful than others. I will tell you a few of these words or expressions and I would like to get your views on them. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. When you hear the expression 'being a mother', what are the first words that come to your mind?

What for you is the meaning of this expression?

Is there a better way to say the same thing?

2. When you hear the expression 'domestic violence', what are the first words that come to your mind?

What for you is the meaning of this expression?

Is there a better way to say the same thing?

3. When you hear the word 'abuse', what are the first words that come to your mind?

What for you is the meaning of this word?

Is there a better word to say the same thing?

Part 2 – The main concerns

This part aims to understand women's main concerns in relation to mothering in the context of domestic violence.

4. As you know this research is about being a mother when experiencing physical or emotional abuse from a partner or boyfriend. What issues should be addressed in this research?

5. What do you think are the main difficulties women face when experiencing this situation?

6. In the research, I would like to know more about the different services involved (such as the police, refuges, health visitors, housing and social services) and whether they make life easier or more difficult. Which services should I consider and why?

Some women themselves use the word 'neglect' when they talk about domestic violence. For instance, in a previous research project a woman said:

'I was so hooked into placating him that I emotionally neglected the kids.'

7. What do you think about the use of the word 'neglect'?

What for you is the meaning of this word?

Is this word helpful or unhelpful?

Part 3 – Process

This part aims to obtain women's perspectives on how the research is or should be conducted.

8. In the next stage, I wish to have some one-to-one discussions with women who have experienced being a mother when experiencing abuse. The aim of these discussions would be to know more about women's personal views and experiences.

What should I consider when planning these discussions?

9. For the moment, the main way I am finding participants is through refuges or organisations working in the domestic violence field.

Do you think this is a good way to find participants?

Do you have any suggestions about how else I could find participants?

10. It is not common to be a man doing research on this topic. What do you think about this?

What do you think could be the advantages or disadvantages?

11. How could I make sure the results of this research reach women and are useful for them (both participants and other women)?

Conclusion

12. How does it feel to be involved like this in a research project?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Topic guide – Individual interviews

Introduction

Presentation of the aims and modalities of the research and interview.

Reviewing the content of the leaflet and signing the research agreement.

Part 1 – Being a mum

1. What does 'being a mum' mean to you?

What do people expect from mothers?

2. What does 'being a dad' mean to you?

What do people expect from fathers?

3. Why do you think people do not expect the same things from mothers and fathers?

How did you experience it in your own life?

Part 2 – Being a mum when experiencing abuse

4. What is it like being a mother when abuse is happening?

What were the main difficulties?

Did you develop strategies to mother in these circumstances?

5. What is like being a mother during and after separation?

What were the main difficulties?

Did you develop strategies to mother in these circumstances?

6. What is it like being a mother once the abuse has stopped?

What were the main difficulties?

Did you develop strategies to mother in these circumstances?

7. What kind of support is needed to help women look after their children?

When the abuse occurs?

When the abuse has stopped?

Part 3 – Services

8. Which services have you been in contact with?

9. What did they expect from mothers?

How did they say or show this?

10. How do you think they saw you as a mother?

How did it make you feel?

How did it influence the way you saw yourself as a mother?

How did it influence your behaviours?

11. Did the services make your life easier or more difficult?

12. Based on your experiences, how do services could be improved?

Conclusion

13. How does it feel to be involved like this in a research project?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

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