



Women Who Kill Friends, Acquaintances or Strangers:

A Feminist Exploratory Study

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Declaration

I, Theresa C. Lynch, certify that the thesis entitled 'Women Who Kill Friends, Acquaintances or Strangers: A Feminist Exploratory Study' presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

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Date: 17 March 2015.....

Abstract

This study is an analysis of court transcripts of 14 murder cases concerning 18 women who were charged with either murder or manslaughter of a friend, acquaintance or stranger in Victoria, Australia, between 1995 and 2007. This research improves understanding of women's lethal violence towards non-family and the lives that lead to this violence.

This study considers the nature of women's killing of non-family. In particular, it examines the motivations of these 18 women who killed, their social and economic circumstances, the specific scenarios in which they killed, and the aftermath of the deaths. Six of the murders were unplanned and eight murders, involving 12 women, were planned.

Rather than understanding women's violence as embedded in their victimisation, this research highlights their agency and argues that this must be taken into account in explaining their criminal offending. While some of these women could be considered disadvantaged with difficult life histories of economic vulnerability, mental ill health, drug and alcohol use, and sexual violence, there is also evidence among the group that there is diversity and some women were not so affected.

The findings support the work of other feminist researchers who have sought more nuanced understandings of women who kill. The research makes a contribution to theorising women's violence by generating knowledge about the specific contexts in which women use lethal violence against friends, acquaintances or strangers.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| AIC | Australian Institute of Criminology |
| AustiLII | Australasian Legal Information Institute |
| MC | Magistrates' Court, Victoria |
| HCA | High Court of Australia |
| LEAP | Victoria Police Law Enforcement Assistance Program |
| NHMP | National Homicide Monitoring Program |
| OPP | Office of Public Prosecutions |
| SCV | Supreme Court of Victoria |
| SCV (A) | Supreme Court of Victoria (AustiLII) |
| SCVA (A) | Supreme Court of Victoria – Court of Appeal AustiLII |
| US | United States |

Chapter One

Introduction

Homicide is an extreme form of violence that provokes much interest in the public arena. It is a crime that has a devastating impact on a wide circle of people. Although a statistically rare event, homicide is considered the most serious offence under Australian law (Mouzos, 2000, p. 1). A total of 257 homicide incidents were reported across Australia in the period 2009-2010 (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 3). Homicides mainly occur between intimates and family members with just over a quarter happening among acquaintances and/or friends (Mouzos, 2001).

International studies identify homicide as a characteristically masculine activity (Blanchette, 2005; Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2003; Mann, 1996; Morgan, 2002; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994; Sgja, 2009; Wallace, 1986). In Australia, males offend about seven times that of females (James & Carach, 1997; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004; Mouzos, 2005, 2003; Strang, 1991). In a recent study undertaken by the Australian National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) reporting on the period 2007–2008, females accounted for 12 per cent of known offenders (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 24). This has been a common trend in all NHMP reports. Although the number of women who kill is relatively low compared to men, there is an average of about 44 women homicide offenders in Australia each year (Mouzos, 2003, p. 41).

As males statistically account for the majority of homicides, research into women's lethal violence has remained on the margins in Australia and overseas (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Fitzroy, 2005; Mann, 1996; Morgan, 2002; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1997; Seal, 2010; Wallace,

1986). Given that mainly men perpetrate homicide, it is not surprising that the focus of homicide research has been on men (Kirkwood, 2003, p. 152). Over the last two decades researchers have challenged this marginalisation of women's offending in homicide research (Chan, 2001; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011).

Of the relatively few studies conducted on women and homicide, the research is heavily focused on women who kill within the family. This literature tells us that women are likely to kill those who are closest to them. They either kill their violent intimate partner or kill their children as a result of psychological disturbance (Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1997; Seal, 2010). These profiles then shape how we understand the violent female offender: women who kill in these circumstances are likely to be given greater understanding as their violence is thought to stem from their victim status and powerlessness (Kirkwood, 2000; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Seal, 2010). However, less is known about women who kill outside the family. These murders are considered unusual and they are seldom the focus of research. My research is an attempt to redress this oversight.

When women kill violently outside the family, they are the subject of intense public interest. Journalists such as Tame (2009) in his book examining Australia's 'most notorious female criminals', however, do little to provide a conceptual framework to understand women who kill. Rather it is storytelling, designed to titillate by depicting women who kill violently as abnormal and dangerous, and to appease a public that has a morbid fascination with female homicide. There are a plethora of populist crime writers, including Tame, who vilify women by reporting that they are not only deadlier than men, but more cold-blooded and therefore not 'real' women. Kiely (1999) also writes that he will convince us (through his stories of Irish 'bloody' women killers) that women are deadlier than men. Aided by these

populist depictions, women's violence is frequently seen as more complex, insidious and deviant. Such explanations also contribute to further alienation and fear of women who act violently. The positioning of women's violence as an individual pathology and an 'abnormality' makes it possible for women to be vilified and inhibits other explanations for their violence. Because women's killing is abhorrent to popular ideas about what it is to be a woman, there is a tendency to retreat into stereotypes of the 'evil', 'deviant' or 'mad' woman to explain their homicidal behaviour (Chan, 2001, p. 1). Further research is needed to better understand the circumstances and motivations of such women.

A significant challenge of feminist endeavour over the last few decades has been to disentangle the discourses and ideologies which construct and perpetrate such stereotypes of women's violence. These caricatures are unhelpful as they fail to consider the gendered inequalities from which violence can emanate, or, indeed, other reasons as to why women act in such ways (Wesely, 2006, p. 304). Many feminists have drawn our attention to stories of women who kill their abusive partner and sought justice for them as victims of male violence (Chan, 2002; Kirkwood, 2000; Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010). They have also highlighted experiences of psychological disturbance associated with women killing their own children (Kirkwood, 2000; Motz, 2001). However, some feminists have been cautious of these profiles of the female killer with their emphasis on female victimhood and denial of female agency (Mason & Stubbs, 2010; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Pearson, 1997; Seal, 2010). By concentrating on victimisation in explanation of female violence, they argue, such accounts fail to see women as having agency, responsibility and culpability for their criminal actions (Carrington, 2013; Daly, 2010, p. 233; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Morrissey, 2003; Pearson 1997). In the last two decades, many feminist scholars have sought to advance our knowledge of the different expressions of women's violence, beyond those built around portrayals of the victimised female offender (Carrington, 2013; Daly, 2008, 2010; Denton,

2001; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Miller 2002, 2004; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011).

Australian researchers Mouzos (2003) and Kirkwood (2000) for example concluded that women kill across a range of circumstances and act in circumstances other than that of responses to their victimisation. Their studies of women and homicide noted the limited efficacy of earlier feminist and criminological theories to adequately explain circumstances in which women kill non-family. Mouzos' (2003) and Kirkwood's (2000) work has been substantiated by more recent research undertaken by Robert-Stainsby (2011) and Whately (2012). These researchers, too, found that women killed in diverse circumstances, and committed violence of their own volition, both within and outside the context of intimate relationships.

My study builds on this body of research by presenting a detailed analysis of the nature and circumstances of 14 recent cases of women's killing of non-family. The research centres on 18 women who have been charged with either murder or manslaughter of a person who is not a family member, or an intimate partner, in Victoria, Australia between 1995 and 2007. The thesis relies on an extensive analysis of court records. While there are limitations to the use of these data sources, as further explained in Chapter Three, they provide detailed information about many aspects of the women's lives and the murders they committed. My research is an attempt to improve understanding of women's lethal violence towards non-family and the lives that lead to this violence.

The definition of 'non-family' in this thesis includes the categories of friends, strangers and acquaintances. However, these categorisations can be problematic because relationships

between the victims and women who killed them were not always clear. This is not surprising, as there is a wide diversity of relationships between the scope of friendship and acquaintance representing different degrees of intimacy (Mouzos, 2001, p. 1). Despite diversity in relationships there are also common features. Therefore, in this study, strangers were people of whom the perpetrator had no prior knowledge. Acquaintances were victims who had some functional relationship with the perpetrator but with whom the relationship was devoid of intimacy. Friendships involved personal contact between victim and offender, which was more frequent and more intense than that of acquaintances. Although these distinctions have been important throughout the analysis, the definition of non-family has been used to capture all those circumstances in which women killed outside the context of familial relationships and including intimate partners. Conversely, I have excluded from the analysis cases where a family member or ongoing intimate partner was the victims of crime.

Throughout this study the main question which has remained central to the research and subsequent analysis is:

- What is the nature of women's killing of non-family members?

In order to find answers to this key question the following sub-questions were used to guide data collection and analysis:

- What are the social and economic circumstances of women who kill non-family members?
- What are the motivations of women who kill non-family members?
- How did women respond after their act of killing?

In setting out to explore the motivations and circumstances of women who killed outside the family, my research into their violence was initially framed through the lens of their victimisation and disadvantage: some of the women indeed had profound experiences of abuse and subsequent mental ill health and harmful drug and alcohol use. However it became evident that this approach was not sufficient to explain their actions. Although some of these women had difficult life circumstances, they were simultaneously situated as perpetrators of lethal violence, and not all had lives of such suffering. As this study reveals, the women's stories defy understandings of homicidal offending arising solely out of their victimisation status.

In analysing the data, two major patterns of homicides were identified. Unplanned murders involved scenarios of spontaneous confrontation leading to lethal violence. Planned murders were associated with revenge killings. The murders are discussed in the light of these two categories. In both these scenarios the women were willfully aggressive and, while their intentions may have not been to kill, at the very least they sought to bring serious harm and injury to their victims.

The cost of ignoring this form of women's criminal offending is high. Limited research equates to a misunderstanding of the nature of women's homicidal behaviour. In addition, the wider task of feminist analysis to challenge disparaging and restrictive gender stereotypes is incomplete if researchers ignore the actions of women who kill outside the circle of family relationships (Seal, 2010). Carrington (2013, pp. 73-74) argues for a range of qualitative projects to capture the perspectives of women as offenders so that feminist theories of violence are 'contextualised rather than abstract and essentialist'. Building on the work of Kirkwood (2000), Mouzos (2003) and others, this study develops further

understanding of the circumstances in which women kill friends, acquaintances and strangers.

Definition of homicide

Under Australian law homicide refers to a person killed unlawfully, and includes all cases resulting in a person or persons being charged with murder or manslaughter (Fairall, 2012; Fisse & Fairall, 1995; Mouzos, 2003, 2000; Viredua & Payne, 2010). Each Australian state and territory defines homicide through criminal law and as a result there are varying definitions in terms of degree, culpability and intent (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 1). As the cases analysed in this thesis are from Victoria, reference is made to Victorian law. Murder applies to the most serious homicides and carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Under Victorian law a person is guilty of murder when they intentionally kill another or cause someone serious injury that results in the death of another (Ross, 2009, p. 718; Sentencing Advisory Council, 2013). The law states that it is not a sufficient excuse for a person to say that they only intended to seriously injure the person. Murder can also be proved by reckless indifference to human life and if the killing occurred while committing a crime of violence (felony murder) (Ross, 2009, p. 918; Wallace, 1986, p. 24). In both instances the mental element of murderous intent is satisfied (Ross, 2009; Wallace, 1986, p. 24).

Manslaughter is considered a less serious form of homicide than murder and one in which the killing is not judged as intentional (Mann, 1986, p. 24; Morrissey, 2003, p. 71). The principal distinction between murder and manslaughter thus 'lies in the nature of the mental element required for the respective crimes, and the operation of certain defences which reduce murder to manslaughter' (Fairall, 2012, p. 9; Fisse & Fairall, 1995, p. 10).

Under Victorian law the offence of manslaughter carries a maximum penalty of 20 years (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2013).

The crime of manslaughter may occur in two ways. Manslaughter may be committed by non-intentional conduct, described as grossly negligent, but there is not the intention of death or grievous bodily harm (Fairall, 2012, p. 10; Fisse & Fairall, 1995, p. 10; Ross, 2009, p. 885). It may also be committed in voluntary circumstances, where death or grievous bodily harm is intended, but the presence of mitigating factors prevents the killing being constituted as murder (Morrissey, 2003, p. 71; Ross, 2009, p. 885; Sentencing Advisory Council, 2007, p. 9). Voluntary manslaughter is considered generally more culpable as the offender intends to kill or cause grievous harm, and this is not the case in involuntary manslaughter (Freckelton & Andrewartha, 2010, p. 718).

Up until 2005 and within the period of this study, a charge of murder could be reduced to manslaughter by reason of provocation, excessive self-defence, diminished responsibility, infanticide or participation in a suicide pact (Fisse & Fairall, 1995, pp. 10–11; Ross, 2009, p. 885). Under reforms made by the Victorian Government, provocation is no longer a partial defence to murder (Toole, 2012, p. 2). Under the *Crime (Homicide) Act 2005*, an alternative verdict of defensive homicide has been created to acknowledge 'self-defence, duress and sudden or extraordinary emergency' (Victorian Government, 2005a).

All the cases analysed in this study involved an original charge of murder. However, due to a range of mitigating factors, including the operation of certain defences, the charge of murder was reduced to voluntary manslaughter in some cases.

Positioning myself

This study was a personal journey to understand extreme forms of violence committed by women. As a feminist who has been driven for almost three decades to support efforts of attaining equality and justice for women impacted by male violence, this journey was initially fraught. Having worked in the area of violence prevention for nearly 30 years, I had a professional understanding that violence was a gendered phenomenon. Like other radical feminists influenced by the women's movement in the 1980s I understood violence as a source of oppression for women (Kelly, 1996; Scutt, 1983). Violence was understood to be a method of control and abuse of power used by men and made possible by the forces of patriarchy.

Prior to this study my Research Masters degree examined the connection between the formation of hegemonic masculinities and male violence in schools. This earlier study was important to me as it explored how violence was impacting on the life experiences of young men. Up until this time my commitment to the political struggles of women meant prioritising the experiences of women and children impacted by male violence. While this earlier study confirmed knowledge that violence was gendered it provided a clearer understanding that men have different engagements with violence and that not all men are advantaged in the creation of hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities serve as an instrument of oppression not only to women but to men who are vulnerable and do not fit the model of the 'ideal male' (Connell, 2000; Pease, 1997). My Masters' thesis heightened my awareness of the complex interplay between hegemonic masculinities, male violence and men. In doing so, I became more sensitive to how male violence also constrains some men. Therefore, in thinking about how to create equality for women, it became important for me to explore more deeply how male violence impacted both men and women.

During this period I experienced daily challenges concerning my understanding of the nature of women's violence. Teachers were increasingly being confronted by young women fighting and hurting others vulnerable to them in the school arena. There was also a spate of media exposure to the recording on mobile phones of young girls fighting. Building on my better understanding of the perpetration of male violence, I began to consider the nature of women's violence. However, this attention in the public arena to the different forms of female violence was also occurring at a time when right-wing conservatism had re-entered the political arena. The men's rights movement, in their efforts to reassert authoritarian forms of masculinity, argued they were being disadvantaged by feminist reforms. Their lobbying was having a pernicious effect on gender reform (Connell, 2000; Messner, 1997; Pease, 1997). I was concerned, then, that when I proceeded to undertake my doctoral studies on women's violence, that my research may be perceived as being aligned with this backlash against feminist reform. However, as my immersion into my doctoral studies unfolded, these concerns became less important as the task of focusing on the nature of women's violence became paramount.

Where once I relied on radical feminist theories to shed light on aspects of women's lives, these theories proved inadequate in providing an explanation for why the women in this study killed. I had to be liberated from radical feminist discourse, concerned with locating women's violence as a response to men's abuse, in order to understand more completely the nature of their offending. Subsequently, by problematising the universalisation of women's experiences, I explored questions of women's violence beyond explanations of their victimisation. The study provides evidence that women do not have to be victims or disadvantaged to be capable of lethal violence.

Overview of thesis

This chapter has outlined the topic of this thesis and explained why this study was commenced. Chapter Two explores the literature on women and violence. First, there is discussion of key radical feminist and other contributions to our understanding of violence, followed by an examination of more recent theories of women's offending. Second, there is an exploration of literature on women who kill through discussion of key Australian homicide research, and international classifications of homicide profiling the nature and circumstances of female homicide. Finally, there is discussion on other research that has examined the circumstances in which women kill and exploration of the different theoretical explanations for their offending.

Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the methodology for this investigation. Central to this study was the development of a feminist model of inquiry into female violence. Therefore this chapter commences with a summary of key features of feminist research. Limitations of the methodology and ethical concerns are also discussed. In particular there is discussion of the use of court transcripts and other legal documents as key sources of data, and their limitations. An important part of this thesis has been learning the value of enlisting the support of a counsellor for debriefing and therapeutic support. Therefore in this chapter there are reflections on the personal challenges and vulnerabilities of immersing and exposing oneself, over a nine-year period, to distressing stories of murder and excessive violence. This has been a very humbling aspect of this study, and it is hoped by drawing on these experiences to contribute to the body of knowledge on the benefits of therapy for researchers investigating and writing about difficult human tragedies.

In the following four chapters there is discussion on the women, the murders, and their aftermath. Chapter Four provides an introduction to the 18 women, their victims and the 14 murders examined in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to identify key patterns and features of the female offender's backgrounds, circumstances and motivations, causes of death, and whether the murders were committed alone or in the company of others. Sentencing outcomes for each woman are also discussed. In addition, an overview of the backgrounds and life experiences of the victims is detailed, and the types of relationship that existed between the victims and the women offenders are outlined. This material assists in understanding what led to the homicidal act (Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). Where available, the backgrounds of the male co-offenders are also discussed.

Chapter Five considers the background of each woman in more detail, including the women's economic circumstances and their experiences of sexual assault, mental ill health, alcohol and drug use, and family support. Where possible, reference is made to their childhood, adolescence and adulthood, for each of these aspects. Within each discussion of the background to the women, where relevant, reference is made to two groups - those who committed unplanned murders, and the others who undertook planned murders. In Chapters Six and Seven there is an examination of the motivations shaping the decisions and actions of each of the women and detailed analysis of all the key characteristics of each crime. Chapter Six examines the six unplanned murders, while Chapter Seven is focused on the eight planned murders. There are distinguishing characteristics and motivations between unplanned and planned murders and also some common themes. Discussion in each chapter identifies scenarios in which women killed alone and those that involved other offenders. The methods used to murder the victims, the impact of precipitating factors and the influence of drugs and alcohol are presented. This discussion provides strong evidence that some women who kill do so with little regard for their victims and are capable of

brutality. Although most of the murders were distinctly violent, among the planned homicides there were examples of the most extreme use of violence.

Chapters Six and Seven also focus on the aftermath of the violent killings, as the accounts of murder are incomplete without consideration of the women's conduct and emotional responses to the deaths of their victims. It is in the aftermath of each murder that the behaviour of each woman is particularly unsettling. After most of the murders, the women expressed no remorse for their actions, and showed indifference and callousness towards their victims.

Chapter Eight draws together the key findings of this thesis; first, in terms of the circumstances of the lives of the women studied and, second, in terms of the nature of the unplanned and planned murders. The contributions of this study to understandings of women who kill non-family and feminist theories of women's violence are highlighted.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature on women's violence and women's offending in the area of homicide. Key radical feminist contributions to our understanding of violence and their critics are discussed and then other, more recent, feminist explanations of women's offending are examined. An exploration of the literature on women who kill through discussion of Australian homicide research is then undertaken. International classifications of homicide and other significant factors identified as relevant to women's offending including socioeconomic status, mental health and trauma, and drug and alcohol use are also explored. Finally other research that has examined the circumstances in which women kill is explored and the different theoretical explanations for their offending is discussed.

Theories explaining women's violence

Over the last four decades there has been a depth and proliferation of feminist theoretical and political work (Howe, 2008, p. 148). It is from this understanding that there is no single feminist viewpoint but rather a diversity of feminist theorising of violence that key feminist views are summarised.

To make sense of women's oppression, the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s played a critical role in deconstructing routine notions of violence though using the specific concepts of power and gender (Brownmiller, 1973; Firestone, 1970; Ruether, 1983; Scutt, 1983). Radical feminist theorising located violence as the domain of men,

and identified it as a key mechanism maintaining a system of structured power and oppression. The fundamental theme of radical feminism was that women as a social group were oppressed by men and that this oppression caused suffering to women (Rowland & Klein, 2013, p. 273; Tong, 1998, p. 47). Individual acts of male violence, it was argued, were intrinsic to this wider oppression and control of women by men. In radical feminist theory, women's bodies, reproductive capacities and sexuality were considered primary sites of male domination (Rowland & Klein, 2013, p. 273). According to Tong (1998, p. 47), within the radical feminist community these factors limited women's capacity to function as full human beings. Every avenue of power in society, according to radical feminists, was deeply rooted in history, and social, cultural and economic structures sustaining women's oppression and inequality. The task of radical feminism was to understand how women's oppression was sustained and produced and how women might be liberated from it.

Radical feminists contested widespread and popular biological and essentialist theories, which argued that male violence was functional to the preservation of the human species, with males possessing an innate sense of aggression and uncontrollable sexual urges. According to biological theories used to explain male violence, women are subject to the possession by and abuse of men. Men are also excused for their behaviours as this positioning of male violence suggests they are unable to deflect the psychological changes that occur when their anger is aroused. While it is conceivable that men are in part affected by their biological functions, this should not diminish or excuse the behaviour of violent men. The perilous implications of essentialist theories are profound for both men and women as under this analysis male violence can be considered both justified and immutable (Rowland & Klein, 2013, p. 297). Despite these long standing critiques, biological theorising continues to play a significant role in

discussion on violence. It remains popular for explaining the aggressive and lethal responses of men and is also used to explain women's expressions of violence.

However, unlike male violence which is construed as natural, female violence is sometimes considered an aberration and ineffectual.

Much feminist theorising of violence in the 1980s and 1990s echoed early feminist claims that sexual, emotional, physical and economic abuse of women was symptomatic of wider oppression and control by men. One of many feminist concerns over the last few decades has been to sensitise society to the ways in which women are victimised by male violence. Radical feminists have drawn our attention to and documented women's victimisation in the areas of sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence, to emphasise the common experiences of women (Chesney-Lind, 2006; Connell, 2009; Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 8). However, although radical feminists agreed that patriarchy was the primary source of oppression, this did not mean that there was agreement about how best to eliminate it (Tong, 1998, p. 47). Radical feminist thinkers have also been criticised for essentialism, or supporting a biological 'world of a division between male and female' (Rowland & Klein, 2013, p. 296; Tong, 1998, p. 47). Some radical feminists counter that the reduction of radical feminism to a simplistic biological deterministic argument is a political ploy to limit the effectiveness of the analysis (Rowland & Klein, 2013, p. 297). Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to reflect on the polarising debates about radical feminism, there is agreement from both critics and proponents about the inherent risk of rooting analysis in biology. There is also agreement that with the empirical work undertaken by radical feminists, greater knowledge exists of women's experiences of men's violence. In the criminal arena, empirical work undertaken by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s helped to expose the omission of girls and women in the general explanations of crime, and the significance

of their victimisation in the areas of physical and sexual violence (Daly, 2010, pp. 299 – 233). This research was important for capturing a greater understanding of women's victimisation and their subsequent offending, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As theorised by some radical feminists, the forces of patriarchy legitimatise the use of violence by men. Here, violence is seen as a continuum of male behaviours that take on many forms, and range from the more subtle and pervasive forms of coercion, intimidation, abuse and harassment to the more serious acts including assault, rape and murder. In all forms of violent behaviour, the perpetrator's intention is to exert power and control over their victim. These views on male violence alert us to the idea that patriarchy is dependent on hierarchal relationships and systems of domination and control.

Influential profeminist theorising in the 1990s shifted emphasis to the idea that violence was linked to hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Pease, 1997). In this work, hegemonic forms of masculinity were characterised by heterosexuality, power, authority and violence. Violence for some men is a way of asserting their identity and reputation as a 'real man'. By linking violence to dominant forms of masculinity we understand that different men will have different engagements with violence depending on their class, race, sexuality and socioeconomic background (Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1998; Pease, 1997). While patriarchy benefits all men, not all men are advantaged in the same way as dominant forms of masculinity are used to constrain and oppress marginalised individuals and groups (Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1998; Pease, 1997).

From the 1980s, greater academic attention was also paid to class and race differences between women and it was argued that no unitary explanation that could be generalised to account for all experiences. The notion that all women struggle similarly with the sexist and abusive practices of patriarchy was debunked (Connell, 2009; Howe, 2008). In criminological literature, this focus also inspired new ways of reflecting and analysing the different experiences of women in respect to class, race and ethnicity (Daly, 2010, p. 230).

These developments assisted in the project of deconstructing socially dominant norms of femininity. While women's lives are shaped by their gender, the construction of gender is complex and other factors, such as class and race, intersect to create the conditions of women's lives. Thus there is understanding of the divergent experiences of women in crime as victims and offenders (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 3). In the area of violence, Howe (2008, p. 154) argues that one of the most difficult challenges for feminists is to reframe male violence to account for the different ways in which women experience violence. As argued by Kirkwood (2003, p. 155), the contributions of feminist work to show that men's violence is not about a biological or psychological disposition, but rather the result of social, cultural and structural factors, could also be used to analyse women's aggression and violence.

As feminists and profeminists have expanded knowledge of the construction of gender, there has also been the development of a greater understanding of the constructions of femininities. Such analyses of gender inform us that there are dominant, normative forms of femininity that are socially and culturally more powerful than other femininities, with heterosexual femininity being granted a higher symbolic value (Seal, 2010, pp. 14-16). The rejection of fixed differences in masculinities and femininities

enables an acceptance that femininity is not always associated with women and masculinity is not always connected to men. The idea that femininity is multiple and performative is useful for decoding representations of women who kill (Seal, 2010, p. 13). Currently, murder by women is contradictory to normalised forms of femininity (Seal, 2010, p. 13). Women who kill and transgress normal boundaries of femininity can be considered dangerous and induce both horror and fascination (Burfoot & Lord, 2011; Morrissey, 2006; Seal, 2010, pp. 18-19). These new constructions of gender provide an intellectual pathway for exploring the peripheral representations of gender of women who kill.

Acknowledging female culpability tends to be difficult in feminist discourse that locates female violence in the victim status. It is an invidious position to be in when debating the choices and agency of women in perpetrating violence. As Gordon (1986, p. 68) suggests '[d]efending women against violence is so urgent that we fear women's loss of status as political, deserving "victims" if we acknowledge women's own aggressions....' Recent feminist work has helped to reveal the fragility of gender identities and the fluidity of gender categories (Connell, 2009, pp. 42-43). Therefore, while finding ways not to undermine the women's movement forms part of the challenge for feminists in understanding women's violence, these ideas have helped in developing an understanding to the relationships between power, gender and violence (Kirkwood, 2003, p. 155).

Although there is danger in oversimplifying the complex nature of social relations, understanding male dominance is helpful in terms of explaining the dynamics of dominance in intimate relationships. Systems of oppression contribute to relationships of power and dominance and shape violence in intimate relationships (Domestic

Violence and Incest Resource Center, 2001; Haskell, 2001). This includes violence in same-sex relationships. For example, although women's violence does not only occur in lesbian relationships, it is in the investigation of lesbian abuse that feminist theorising is compelled to consider the differences and similarities in abusive intimate relationships. Significantly, the exploration of lesbian violence tests feminist theory of violence (Bird, 2004). Lesbian violence particularly challenges the idea that violence is caused by unequal power relationships between men and women (Bagshaw & Chung, 2000, p. 11). Lesbian violence also defies the notion of fixed and conventional categories of gender identities.

Although it is difficult to do justice to the depth of feminist theoretical work, this section has identified key radical feminist views on violence and their critics and it has identified an intellectual pathway for exploring representations of women who kill. In the next section attention is given to recent criminological literature exploring the nature of women's offending.

Theories of female offending

As violence and violent crime has been considered the domain of men, historically, criminology has tended to neglect women and the nature of women's offending (Carlen, et al., 1985; Chan, 2001; Jones, 1996; Mazerolle, 2008; Naffine, 1996). Early criminological theorising, based on evolutionary explanations for describing criminal behaviour, linked female offending to masculine traits and posited pathological and biological understandings of the female criminal. These sexist stereotypes are evident in the writings of early scholars in criminology including Ferrero and Lombroso (1897) and Pollack (1961).

Although Ferrero and Lombroso's (1897) genetics theory of crime based on an individual's physique has lost credibility in criminological thought, there has been a 'resurgence of interest in biologically tendencies towards violence' (Brookman, 2005, p. 58). This view is shared by Jones (1996, pp. 5-10) who argues that despite being 'fundamentally alarmist, reactionary, antifeminist and wrong' their views are still considered with some seriousness, with criminologists locating women's criminality in their sexual nature. These sexist presumptions translate into a neglect of women, making them invisible or misrepresenting their criminal behaviour (Carlen et al., 1985; Howe, 2008; Chan, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Logan, 2008; Naffine, 1996; Seal, 2010). Criminological theory has also struggled to seriously attend to women's use of violence outside their own victimisation (Chan, 2001; Koons-Witt et al., 2003; Logan, 2008; Seal, 2010). Over the last few decades feminists have admonished criminology for its neglect of women and distorted and stereotyped accounts of women's offending (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 2).

In drawing attention to the failure of criminology to explain female offending, feminists since the 1970s and 1980s have garnered a growing amount of research, developing theories which are female specific, establishing the notion that female offending is different to male offending and gender is central in any analysis of female conduct (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 29; Koons-Witt et al., 2003, p. 361; Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 2). Daly (2010, p. 230) states that by the end of the 1980s, it was no longer possible to speak of women and men as unified categories and strong claims of gender differences and universalist claims became less tenable. From the 1990s there was a growing body of feminist work invested in an emphasis of women having a greater agency for their

criminal actions (Daly, 2008, 2010; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Maher, 1997; Morrissey, 2003, Pearson, 1997).

In the literature on criminology multiple theoretical explanations now exist to help identify key factors leading to women's offending (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 15). In the following section a critique of four theoretical perspectives, which include general criminological and feminist explanations of female crime is undertaken. These include theories of emancipation, women's economic marginalisation, socialisation and feminist research pathways. Included in this discussion on women's pathways to crime is reference to research on young women's involvement in violent crime and female gangs and women's offending in the illicit drug economy to explain women's agency and responsibility for their offending.

Explanations built around emancipation

Some authors argue that women's liberation has brought women an equal status with men in economic, social and political areas and these achievements will see parallel gains in the criminal arena (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 28). Therefore, with the advent of feminism, women are no longer constrained by traditional stereotyping; opportunities have opened up for women's competitive instincts and aggression to be enacted and as a result women are forging their way and increasing their numbers in criminal areas historically the domain of men (Birch 1994, p. 265; Chesney-Lind, 2006, p. 8; Naffine, 1987, p. 90). The argument suggests women have gained a sense of entitlement to express their tensions and to take a more active role against the world than previously allowed (Birch, 1994, pp. 263-264). In their quest for emancipation, the argument suggests, some women will turn to patterns of male criminal behaviour once

removed from the restrictions of their gender (Chesney-Lind, 2006, p. 11). This flawed explanation of female offending relies upon exaggerated and misrepresented statistics (Belknap, 2001, p. 54; Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 30). Feminists have turned their attention to the illogical nature of the argument, suggesting that the idea that with increased opportunity crime will increase is also in opposition to class and strain theories of offending (Belknap, 2001, p. 55; Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 30). In criminological literature strain theory postulates that the disadvantaged and lower class will commit crime when they cannot achieve financial success or middle-class status (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 37). If one agrees with the argument that economic and life stressors are predictors of increased offending, then it is more likely to conclude that the potential for women to offend will decrease when life opportunities make them less vulnerable.

As well, crimes of violence committed by women have not increased (Blanchette & Brown, 2006; Jones, 1996; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Polk, 1994, 2006; Seal, 2010). Linking the effects of the women's movement to female criminality has led some feminists to argue that little has been achieved in understanding the gender-violent crime relationship (Kruttschnitt, 2009, p. 87). The emancipation argument to explain women's offending has diverted attention away from an understanding of the different patterns and circumstances of women's criminal behaviour. Jones (1996, p. 3) suggests that this overreaction and anxiety, stemming from the fear of both the women's movement and women's criminality, has in history manifested as 'a wave of law enforcement'. Although the emancipation theory has been denounced as a viable explanation of female offending, it has not been abandoned entirely (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 31).

Economic marginalisation theory

Another criminological explanation of women's crime rates is the economic marginalisation hypothesis (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2010, p. 4). These theorists postulate that poverty which produces strain and deprivation is the cause of women's criminal activity (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 31). The theory is based on research indicating that women's economic deprivation and marginalisation is specifically related to economically driven crimes, including robbery, and drug related activities and intimate partner related crimes (Edwards, 1986; Kruttschnitt, 2009; Moe, 2004; Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008; Steffensmeier, 2009). Other research indicates that women's criminal activity was both a strategy for financial and emotional survival and a means of resistance for those women who had experienced living in a violent relationship (Moe, 2004, p. 5). In this argument, women's violence is understood as a response to impoverishment, deprivation, loss, violence, and a lack of educational and/or employment opportunities (Fitzroy, 1998; Polk, 1994; Swan & Snow, 2003, p. 79; Thorpe & Irwin, 1996).

Economic factors are also considered a barometer for understanding the circumstances which lead to some forms of female homicide (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Redkdenwald & Parker, 2008). Women who kill their intimate partner, it is argued, are weakened by strain and frustration resulting from a lack of access to resources and power (Redkdenwald & Parker, 2008, p. 220). However, Mann (1996, p. 168) in her study of female homicide, found the data insufficient to support this economic theory of homicide. The argument that poverty, abuse and marginalisation facilitate criminal activity of female offenders is closely linked to the conceptual framework of 'pathways to crime', which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Socialisation and social learning theories

In criminological research women's offending is often described within the context of theories of socialisation and social learning theories. These perspectives are used to help explain the differences in men's and women's aggression. The frameworks of socialisation and social learning suggest that parents and society are to blame for producing violence in children, through the reinforcing of aggressiveness and physicality in boys, while simultaneously reinforcing passivity, nurturance and gentleness in girls (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 32; Hearn, 1998, p. 24). This, it is argued by proponents of socialisation and social learning, is mainly responsible for the gender differences in crime.

Hearn (1998, p. 204) argues that social learning and socialisation theories do not take into account how individuals experience and relate in the context of social structures. In his view, in social learning theory, violence is seen as an isolated exception to normal behaviour and rarely understood as embedded in social relations (Hearn, 1998, p. 204). What socialisation is really doing, Hearn (1998, p. 27) argues, is reinforcing what is valued and not valued. Children in this process of gendered socialisation are, too, internalising and accepting oppressive power structures (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 33).

Simple theories of socialisation imply that there are fixed gender differences: learners are passive, learning gender is a matter of acquiring traits, and there is only one learning direction (Connell, 2009). In contrast, theories of gender formation tell us that young people grow up with a diversity of gender patterns, and learn that there are multiple masculinities and femininities (Connell, 2009). Young people are also active in the

shaping of their own gender and can be resistant to hegemonic forms of gender (Connell, 2009, p. 96). This is demonstrated through research into young women's involvement in gangs, which shows how young women use their gender to control their participation in violent activities (Miller & Decker, 2001).

Socialisation theorists also tend to assume 'sameness' about women, while failing to recognise the diversity of learning and life experiences that shape the identity of each individual woman. Although there is a connection between abuse and enactment of abuse, the pathways to female violence are far more complicated. We have to be cautious of the use of theories which assume inevitability in patterns of behaviour. For example, in their gendered model of female offending, Steffensmeier and Broidy (2009, p. 127) argue that women are likely to refrain from crime as they are socialised to have empathy and sensitivity to the needs of others. Their argument is that women are restrained from violence because of their tendency to an 'ethic of care' (Steffensmeier & Broidy, 2009, p. 127). Although this explanation is part of a broader discussion including recognition of the social, historical and cultural factors that shape the dynamics of gender (Steffensmeier & Broidy, 2000, pp. 125-127), this perspective lends itself to a view that all women are similarly predisposed to the protection and care of others through the process of socialisation. However, as will be discussed in this thesis, there are variations in how women identify themselves, and in different representations and forms of femininities. Not all women are necessarily predisposed to forms of femininity that influence them to the care and protection of others. Women's offending cannot be adequately explained through the process of socialisation. Not all young women are drawn into criminal offending in the same way and singular explanations are not enough to cover the diverse and complex patterns of female offending (Carrington, 2009).

Pathways to crime

A central concern of feminist research into female offending has been the investigation of the interplay of victimisation and offending in order to more fully understand the events and circumstances that put girls and women at risk of criminal activity (Belknap 2001; Moe, 2004, p. 2). The conceptual framework that is used to explain this process is known as pathways to crime (Belknap, 2001; Brennan et al., 2012; Daly, 1994; Mason & Stubbs, 2010; Moe, 2004, Simpson et al., 2008). More recently, this perspective has lent itself to the development of gender-responsive assessments and treatment interventions in correctional settings (Brennan et al., 2012; Van Voorhis, 2012).

Using this framework, female offending is explained through exploration of the differences in male and female offenders, and by highlighting the high rate of childhood victimisation experienced by young female offenders (Daly, 1994; Makarios, 2007, p. 102; Simpson et al., 2008). The connection between child experiences of incest, sexual and physical abuse and neglect, and adolescent offending has been an important finding of this research (Brunson & Miller, 2009; Chesney-Lind, 2009; Daly, 1994; Simpson et al., 2008). One picture presented in this framework is of young women, with profound experiences of sexual abuse in the family, being forced to leave home. Once living on the streets the need for survival forces them into crime (Chesney-Lind, 2009, p. 31).

Women, then, come into contact with the criminal justice system through defensive violence, childhood exposure to physical violence, trauma and drug use, poverty, mental ill health and unhealthy relationships (Belknap, 2001; Daly, 1994; Simpson et al., 2008; Van Voorhis, 2012). Their offending is also reported as surfacing at different stages in life and, for some, remaining constant throughout their lives (Daly, 1994;

Simpson et al., 2008). A significant finding across studies is the multiplicity of forms of abuse experienced by young female offenders (Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 2009; Daly, 1994; Simpson et al., 2008).

Daly (1994) has been influential in feminist criminology for identifying five pathways to crime through a qualitative study that focused on 40 female defendants sentenced in the New Haven, Connecticut, felony court from 1981 to 1986. Her research identified the following pathways to jail: (a) *The Street Woman Scenario* profiled young women who had run away from home due to abuse or who were drawn to be part of a criminal milieu. Once on the street, women etched out a living from selling drugs and prostitution and they would invariably become affected by drug addiction, leading them to frequent law breaking to support their addiction. Under this profile women were also likely to continue their law breaking if in a relationship with a man involved in crime; (b) *Harmed and Harming Women* described as having chaotic and difficult experiences growing up, including physical or sexual abuse or neglect. They often started alcohol and drug use as teenagers and their violence would escalate when using alcohol. They grew up emotionally paralysed, and angry and abusive towards others; (c) *Battered Women* described their criminal behaviour as being directly related to their experiences of living in a violent relationship; (d) *Drug-Connected Women* described as women who used or sold drugs with partners or family members. Their criminal offending was mainly aligned to their collaborative efforts with the men involved in their lives; (e) *Other Women* described as women whose criminal offences involved fraud, theft and embezzlement, and were related to economic motives and a desire for a more secure lifestyle. These women were not addicted to drugs or alcohol and did not fit the profile of the street woman, and did not have experiences of an abusive family life (Daly 1994, pp. 46–60)

Simpson et al. (2008) attempted to replicate Daly's classification of female pathways to crime in their analysis of 351 high-risk women of mostly African American backgrounds, and to distinguish pathways based on age of onset. Simpson et al. (2008, p. 88) argued that pathways to crime are also age related. In their study, 54 per cent of women committed their first crime in adulthood, a further 36 per cent commenced offending in adolescence, while the remaining 10 per cent began their offending in childhood (Simpson et al., 2008, p. 98). Their results closely replicated Daly's (1994) typologies in three areas: 1) harmed and harming women, 2) drug-connected women, and 3) battered women (Simpson et al., 2008, p. 102). They found distinctive pathways among high-risk women, suggesting that: child onset offenders were more likely to have been sexually abused as children and were therefore more likely to be involved in drug dealing and property crime and offensive violence in adulthood; adolescent onset offenders were no more likely to have been physically or sexually abused as children; and adult onset offenders were more likely to have been violently victimised in adulthood than earlier onset offenders (Simpson et al., 2008, p. 103).

Fitzroy (2005, p. 58) makes the important point that it is less powerful women who come under the 'gaze of statutory bodies', which leads to a confusion as to the types of women who perpetrate violence. In effect, Fitzroy's position is that middle-class women are less likely to be prosecuted for their behaviours. Fitzroy (2005, p. 58) considers that these different responses to women who perpetrate violence are part of society's investment in the notion of the 'good' woman, and that the violence perpetrated by 'good' women is less likely to be reported in any official capacity. Therefore it is only the more vulnerable and disenfranchised women in society who are likely to have their behaviours criminalised. As argued by Fitzroy (2005), under this explanation we have a

possible skewed version of who commits violence. However, in the context of murder, her critique may have less relevance.

The literature on pathways to crime has been important for clarifying the various dimensions of inequality and marginalisation experienced by women and the trajectory of victimisation to offending (Belknap, 2001, p. 70). However, this framework too tends to view women as passive agents in their life circumstances and universalises their experiences (Belknap, 2001, p. 71). Not all girls and young women who have been abused use drugs or turn to criminal offending to cope with life circumstances. While understanding that there are connections to women's victimisation and criminal offending, it is also recognised that women do engage in forms of resistance to their experiences of violence and operate with agency in their life choices and actions. In the next section, there is further discussion around feminist research which challenges the view that women's offending is solely due to their victim status. In discussing women's offending, it is argued that consideration must also be given to their criminal agency.

Feminist perspectives which challenge victimology theses

There is a growing body of feminist research raising caution around the victimology theses (Daly, 2008, 2010; Denton, 2001; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Miller, 2002, 2004; Morrisey, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). Although this research is not necessarily focused on homicide, it sheds light on women's violence. These authors argue that there is overlap between women's experiences of victimisation and criminal offending and that they are not distinctive experiences (Daly, 2010, p. 233). There is concern that by concentrating on the victimisation of females in explaining female violence, feminists fail to see women as having agency, and as responsible and culpable

for their criminal actions (Carrington, 2013; Daly 2010, p. 233; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Morrisey, 2003, Pearson, 1997). In this body of work, which rejects the construction of the violent female as necessarily victimised, feminists seek a more nuanced explanation of female agency (Daly 2008, 2010; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Miller, 2002; Morrisey, 2003; Pearson, 1997). Research on young women's involvement in violent crime and female gangs and women's offending in the illicit drug economy are examples of such arguments.

The studies of Daly (2008, 2010), Miller (2002, 2004), Miller and Decker (2001), Miller and Mullins (2006) and Carrington (2009, 2013) on young women's offending challenge the view that young women's involvement in crime is solely due to their experiences of victimisation and disadvantage. These studies demonstrate that young women, rather than being passive victims of their circumstances, are often strategising their survival in criminal activity. They actively resort to violence in their confrontations with other young women and respond with a sense of justification to use violence (Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller & Mullins, 2006; Daly, 2008). This research also identifies how gender shapes and impacts to both protect and facilitate young women's offending in gang related offending.

Miller and Decker's (2001, p. 124) study is based on surveys and interviews with 27 female gang members aged between 12 and 20 years in St Louis and reports from the St Louis Metropolitan Police Department. Their study found that the greater majority of young women involved in gangs engaged in confrontations with the idea of harming their victim or with the intention of seriously hurting them. Of the women interviewed, 85 percent had engaged in a violent act for the purposes of hurting their victim. They also found that 75 percent of the women used a weapon to injure their victim and that

most of these women were also involved in the selling of crack cocaine and marijuana (Miller & Decker, 2001, p. 124). The majority of the young women's confrontations involved the use of their fists and occasionally a knife was used (Miller & Decker, 2001, p. 124). Miller and Decker (2001, p. 127) report that while confrontations and violence were seen as normative features valued by young women in gangs, they would usually be content to leave these activities to young men. Although suggesting that young women moderate their participation in violent activity, their study reveals young women's involvement in serious gang violence. This use of violence by young women is further supported by Miller's (2004, p. 98) later work in which she reviewed a large body of US research to understand what had been learnt from two decades of research on female involvement in youth gangs. Miller (2004, p. 111) concluded that although girls are rarely involved in serious violence in the same ways as boys, the 'group processes, conflicts, and rivalries provoke girls' participation with rival gang members in ways which are similar to those of young men'.

This research is important as it identifies that girls and young women are prepared to engage in physical attacks, with some young women being prepared to use knives to stab their victims. These studies demonstrate the capacity of young women to involve themselves in initiatives that are designed to cause physical harm to their victims.

Mullins and Miller (2008, p. 54) identified that temporal dynamics and pathways for the escalation of young women's disputes into violence are linked to situational contexts and settings, relationships between those involved in the conflict and the context of urban disadvantage. Mullins and Miller (2008, p. 39) examined three detailed case studies, which have been drawn from two previous investigations based on samples from 'a highly distressed urban African-American community'. Their examination of

both data sets highlights how the execution of a violent act by young women is preceded by a series of multiple triggers that have escalated in either their family, social, friendship and/or criminal networks (Mullins & Miller, 2008, p. 39). They found that young women responded to challenges to reputation, codes of behaviour in relation to boyfriends and insults around dress and appearance, and felt justified in their actions (Mullins & Miller, 2008, pp. 54 – 57). According to Mullins and Miller (2008), these temporal dynamics enable and motivate violent disputes between young women. Their analysis also suggests that young women's *use* of violence is less important for challenging disrespect than the *perceived willingness to do so* (Mullins & Miller, 2008, p. 56). In previous research, Miller and Mullins (2006, p. 61) argued that it is not as important for girls as it may be for boys to actually engage in violent encounters to solidify their social position, but to be seen as willing to stand up for themselves in the face of disrespect.

Daly's (2008) analysis of case studies focused on 'girl-on-girl' assaults that were drawn from South Australian juvenile justice data. All of the offenders in Daly's study (2008, p. 133) believed the 'victims provoked the fight and deserved to be hurt' (Daly, 2008, p. 133). Daly (2008, p. 132) found that young women's offending and their victimisation were intertwined as the context of their offending was located in their experiences of economic and social disadvantage or harassment within the family (Daly, 2008, p. 132). However, in these 'girl-on-girl' assaults she found a shift in meaning, resulting in blurred boundaries between victimisation and criminalisation, as both parties in the assault claimed to be victims (Daly, 2008, p. 133). She also found that some of the young women were more offenders than victims in their assaults as they would continue to harass their victims following the assault and 'were ready to fight with little provocation' (Daly, 2008, p. 133). This research demonstrates that relying on stories of

victimisation is inadequate for explaining women's violence. It is also more than a story about the tension between their victimisation and their role of offenders. As this research suggests, gender also plays a role in shaping, protecting and facilitating women's role in criminal activity.

Feminist discussion around the tensions between agency and victimisation is also found in research concerned with women involved in the illicit drug economy. Both Denton (2001) and Maher (1997) have challenged the portrayal of women arrested and convicted of drug related offences as passive victims. Maher (1997) and Denton (2001) found women would strategise their involvement in the drug economy. Denton's (2001, p. 1) study is based on interviews in Melbourne with women who were known for selling illicit drugs. The interviews were conducted with women in prison and others living in the suburbs. Denton's (2001, p. 160) focus was on successful women running large scale businesses. Maher's (2001) study was based on research undertaken with 200 homeless women who were known crack cocaine users and sex workers on the streets of New York.

Maher (1997) challenges both the portrayal of women as passive victims and the volitional model, arguing that neither can adequately explain the complexities of women's participation in crime. Maher (1997, p. 200) is critical of both feminist studies that attempt to locate women's law breaking as symptomatic of their victimisation and non-feminist studies which locate women's participation in crime as anchored in individualism and free choice. She states that we should neither deny women's criminal agency nor over-endow them with it (Maher, 1997, p. 201). She argues that women's decision making is shaped by the social structures that influence them. In the drug economy, although women demonstrate opportunistic resistances to their life conditions,

they also are constrained by the dynamics of a gender and race-segmented labour market (Maher, 1997). Although women are constrained by these economic and systems they were also negotiating, defining and contesting their life options (Maher, 1997, p. 206).

Denton (2001, p. 175), too, argues that we need to challenge simplistic accounts of women's drug use and criminal patterns to fully understand how they navigate the drug economy. Denton (2001, p. 157) challenges the idea that 'women in the drug economy lack agency'. Denton (2001, p. 162) argues that some feminist arguments are patronising of women, regarding them as either debased 'or at least in need of an excuse'. She says there is a tone in feminist accounts that judges women as needing excuses and judgment about women's drug use that 'takes a form that can be understood in some fairly reductionist fashion due to their status as women' (Denton, 2001, p. 162). Denton (2002, p. 160) explains that as her research progressed, the experiences of the women challenged prevalent views of women as dependent victims. In her view, linking women's experiences of sexual abuse to drug use to lessen the trauma, 'perpetuates women's subordinate status rather than challenges it' (Denton, 2001, p. 163). By uncritically accepting women as victims, female drug users are also potentially located as a homogeneous group with no regard to their different experiences of social class, ethnicity, sexual preference or age and leaves little space for women's agency (Denton, 2001, p. 163). Denton (2001, p. 173) found that women used effective techniques to carry out their business. According to Denton (2001, p. 172), women were neither 'compliant accomplices or pliable dupes'. They were able to use their gender to gain benefits in their business operations (Denton, 2001, p. 173). They achieved this thorough the adoption of 'feminine' skills and charm to gain benefits within the trade (2003, p. 173). It was Denton's (2001, p. 4) view that the women she met

in her research 'were strong and resilient despite their varying social circumstances'. She described them as skillful and resourceful women who purposefully were accomplishing their own goals in their lives (Denton, 2001, p. 4).

Like other researchers who have analysed young women's violence, Denton (2001) and Maher (1997) challenge the theorising of women's offending as being solely located in their victimisation. Both have been able to demonstrate that women's involvement in the drug economy is also in part the product of their own criminal agency.

In this discussion the emergence and diversity of criminological and feminist views to explain women's offending have been highlighted. Feminists have identified the specific experiences of women and brought to our attention the experiences of inequality and marginalisation as the trajectory for women, from victim to offender. However, while framing women's violence through the lens of their victimisation has been identified as important, it is only part of the story, and we should not deny their criminal agency in explaining their offending.

Homicide studies on women who kill

In the next section research into women who kill, examining the nature and extent of women's homicidal offending, are reviewed. The focus is primarily on research undertaken in Australia. As part of this discussion, reference is made to relevant international research into female homicide, and known criminological factors identified as related to women's offending. These factors include motivation, social and economic inequality, mental ill health and alcohol and drug use. There is also an exploration of women kill on their own or with others and their methods of killing including weapons

used to kill. Finally there is a focus on the construction and explanation of motivation, which is central to understanding the catalysts for women to murder.

Australian homicide studies

Not least because homicide is considered a rare event in Australia, homicide studies are few. However, there are some exceptional studies that have greatly contributed to knowledge of homicide in Australia. These include Wallace (1986), Polk (1994), Mouzos (2000, 2003, 2005), James and Carcach (1997) and Strang (1991). Wallace (1986) analysed homicide in New South Wales from 1968 to 1981, looking at both the patterns and circumstances in which homicide occurred. She argued for a social understanding of this phenomenon and is critical of explanations focused on individualist and deterministic views of behaviours (Wallace, 1986, pp. 3,14).

A key theme of Wallace's (1986) research was an understanding that there is a social context to each murder. Rather than homicide being seen as a configuration of the characteristics of an individual, she argued that there is a social reality, which includes the relationship between the perpetrator and victim and the actual act of violence (Wallace, 1986). Wallace (1986, p. 14) argued that homicide needs to be viewed as being no different than other unacceptable forms of violence, other than it is at the extreme end of a continuum. According to Wallace (1986, p. 14), this avoids the psychological categorising of homicide offenders as abnormal, deterministic views of aggressive behaviours, and overly simplistic ideas based on demographics and statistical links. She further argued that it is sometimes chance which determines whether an assault becomes a homicide, and in this sense there is no difference to this form of violence and other serious forms of assault (Wallace, 1986, p. 8).

Polk (1994) has also contributed significantly to our understanding of the social relationship between victim and offender, and masculinity and homicide. With Ranson (Polk & Ranson, 1989), Polk examined homicide files in the Coroner's Office in Victoria for the period 1985 and 1986 and established distinct themes differentiating types of victim and offender relationships. He later explored records from the Office of the Coroner for the State of Victoria on cases of homicide during the period 1985 and 1989. This particular study was primarily focused on masculine scenarios of violence (Polk, 1994). His work is exceptional due to the qualitative nature of his methodology in both studies. The narratives highlight patterns in which men become involved in murder. Similarly to Wallace (1986), he stressed the significance of the social relationship between the perpetrator and the offender. Other important Australian research includes the work of Strang (1991). Similar to Wallace and Polk, Strang (1991) identified the characteristics of individuals at risk of 'homicide victimisation' – those likely to commit homicide – and the circumstances in which homicide is likely to occur.

The longstanding work of Mouzos (1999, 2000, 2003, 2005) in the area of homicide research has also established significant insights into the nature of homicide. She is distinguished, because she has explored not only the general patterns of homicide in Australia through her work for the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP), but because she has undertaken more specific research into women's lethal violence in Australia in her doctoral studies. It was her work into female homicide which greatly influenced the objectives of this study.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has since 1989 supported the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP). A report titled *Violence: Directions for Australia* (1990) by the National Committee on Violence (1988–1990), identified there was no

systematic information collected in Australia detailing the nature and extent of homicide (Strang, 1991, p. 3). Hence the NHMP program was established to collect and annually report on incidents classified as homicide from police forces in all States and Territories (Morgan, 2002, p. 6). Strang produced the first three studies from the NHMP (Mouzos, 2000, p. 2). From this work and subsequent NHMP reports, a national overview has been established, identifying information on victims, offenders, the incident, and relationship between victim and offender. Importantly, the NHMP also monitors patterns and trends across Australian jurisdictions (Viredua & Payne, 2010, p. iii). This data has been the basis for the research results produced by James and Carach (1997), Mouzos (1999, 2000, 2003, 2005) and Strang (1990, 1991). The data used by NHMP, like most homicide studies, relies on statistical analysis (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 60). In the period 1989 to 1999 there were an average of 315 homicide incidents each year (Mouzos, 2000, p. xix). There was a decrease in the number of homicide incidents with the NHMP recording a total of 257 homicides across Australia in 2009-2010 (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 3). In all of the above studies the ratio of male to female offending is around 7:1. Research in Victoria undertaken from 2005 to 2010 also records males committing more homicides than females (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2011).

Nationally and internationally males account for the majority of homicides. Men's violence is also considered different to women's in that men are more likely to kill outside the family and across a range of social circumstances (Polk, 1994, p. 148; Strang, 1991; Wallace, 1986). In contrast, women's homicide mainly occurs in domestic, close or intimate relationships and tends to be reactive to that intimacy (Seal, 2010; Strang, 1991; Wallace, 1986, p. 148).

Women who kill non-family

As homicide is seen as a distinctly male crime, research into women's lethal violence has remained on the margins (Blanchette, 2006; Chan, 2001; Daly & Wilson, 1988; James & Carcach, 1997; Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005; Polk, 1994; Schwartz, 2012; Steffensmeier, 2009; Strang, 1991; Wallace, 1986; Walsh, 2006). Of the relatively few studies conducted on women and homicide, the research is heavily focused on women who have killed their partners after suffering long histories of abuse, or on women who have killed their children (Mouzos, 2003, p. 11; Polk, 1997; Thorpe & Irwin, 1996, p. 6). The prevailing view of women who kill is subsequently that women are driven by defensive motives and they are strongly provoked by their abusive partners (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 2004; Schwartz, 2012). Although these theories are important for understanding why women kill within the context of the family sphere, they have a limited efficacy in explaining the acts of women who kill non-family.

Despite the lack of research into women who kill non-family, there are a small number of Australian studies which expand our understanding of the patterns and extent of women's lethal violence outside the context of the 'family circle'. These include the studies of Kirkwood (2000), Mouzos (2000, 2003), Robertson-Stainsby (2011), Walsh (2006) and Whitely (2012), which conclude that women too can kill for reasons that are not focused on issues of intimacy and can do so in calculated and rational ways. All these researchers claim, contrary to populist explanations and much research literature, that the homicides of women do involve diverse relationships and circumstances, that women kill for a variety of reasons and that women's violence is more complicated than

stories of reactive violence (Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2003; Robertson-Stainsby, 2011; Walsh, 2006; Whitely, 2012).

Kirkwood (2000, p. 72) used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to examine 77 cases in total in Victoria between 1985 and 1995 in which women were identified as perpetrating a homicide. These were initially identified from the Victorian Police homicide squad's murder books. She went on to collect information on 71 of these cases from the Victorian Coroner's Court, and for the remaining six cases she sought access to files from the Victorian Department of Prosecution. In addition to her examination of the coroner's files, she also examined the Heather Osland trial and subsequent appeals in detail to explore the way in which the criminal justice system treats women who kill (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 76). She found that 37.2 per cent of women in her study killed friends and acquaintances (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 250). Kirkwood (2003, p. 158) notes this was a significant finding that was unexpected. This result is consistent with research undertaken by Mann (1986, p. 109) in the US, who found the numbers of women killing acquaintances increasing. These findings suggest the importance of further research into this area of women and homicide.

In Kirkwood's (2000) examination of women who killed non-family members she found they killed for a variety of reasons including perceived ill treatment of either themselves or somebody close to them (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 204). Although she considers it rare, Kirkwood concedes that it is possible for women to kill for revenge, financial gain or seemingly for no reason at all (2000, p. 204).

Both Kirkwood (2000) and Mouzos (2003) have made significant contributions to our understanding of women and homicide. However, neither researcher interviewed

women directly. Kirkwood (2000) relied on data from coronial files while Mouzos (2003) gathered her information from a range of sources including the NHMP, briefs of evidence, court transcripts and police and homicide files. Fitzroy (2005) explored women's violence and interviewed seven women who were convicted of violent crimes. Her sample included one woman convicted of murder and another of manslaughter.

In her analysis of homicide data in Australia over a 10-year period (1989–1999), Mouzos (2000, p. 3) provides an understanding of emerging trends, demographic differences, victim–offender relationships and situational circumstances contributing to the homicide event. Her examination is quantitative and her sources of data consisted of offence records collected from Australian State and Territory Police for the NHMP and State Coronial records (Mouzos, 2000, pp. 4-5). In this 10-year period there were 3,481 homicide offenders, with men comprising 87.2 per cent of the total number of offenders. Similar to Kirkwood (2000), Mouzos found only a smaller proportion of women who kill (Mouzos, 2000, p. 125). Of this group of women, approximately 18 per cent of female homicide offenders killed a friend or acquaintance and 8 per cent killed strangers (Mouzos, 2000, p. 129). These figures are comparable to her doctoral thesis in which Mouzos examined the circumstances of women killing in Australia between July 1989 and June 2000. Again using data from the NHMP and through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the 3,783 homicide offenders found in this investigation, there were a total of 479 female offenders, totalling 12.7 per cent of total offenders. Of these female offenders, 179 killed a non-family member (Mouzos, 2003, p. 59).

Mouzos (2003) argued that women react violently, engage in violent acts and are capable of killing outside their circle of family relationships. They also engage in forms of violence that are typically known as masculine forms of homicide (Mouzos, 2003, p.

252). Mouzos (2003), like Kirkwood (2000), found that women killed for a variety of reasons. Conflicts, disagreements and perceived wrongdoings in the context of criminal activity, illicit drug markets and addictions and bad debts were key reasons for women killing non-related males in resolving grievances (Mouzos, 2003, p. 252). When women did kill non-related males they did so with other males, signifying that some females were participating in the killings at the behest of dominant males, either out of fear or loyalty (Mouzos, 2003, p. 252). Similarly, when women killed non-related females, just over one half of these homicides involved killing with other offenders (Mouzos, 2003, p. 201). Although half of these homicides involved other female offenders, when males were involved they had a coercive influence over the behaviour of the female offender (Mouzos, 2003, p. 202). The scenarios for killing non-related females were different when women killed on their own, as compared to killing with other female offenders. When killing on their own, the women's motivations to kill included acting out of jealousy, eliminating a sexual rival or to control an intimate partner. In some instances, the killing arose out of a spontaneous flare-up or due to a psychiatric illness (Mouzos, 2003, p. 215). However, when women killed with others, they were engaged in criminal activity in which the victim was killed or the killing was to avenge a perceived wrongdoing (Mouzos, 2003, p.215). Her study also included examples of women killing in murders she deemed as aberrant cases, describing these as the rarest types of homicides, including 'thrill kills' and 'vampire killers' (Mouzos, 2003, p. 56).

Mouzos (2003, p. 12) argues for the importance of further research of women's lethal violence beyond situations where a woman kills her violent partner. Kirkwood (2000) and Mouzos's (2001, 2003) studies contest the idea that women's lethal violence is always submissive or provoked in response to abuse. These findings are supported by Walsh (2006), Robertson-Stainsby (2011) and Whitley (2012). Mouzos's study found

that more than half of the intimate partner homicides were not precipitated by the partner's violence (Mouzos, 2003, p. 110). This is also supported by other international studies. A study undertaken in Finland, (Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003, p. 202), examining the relationship of 61 incarcerated violent female offenders and their victims, found similarly. Although this data supports the view that primarily female violence occurs in the context of an interpersonal conflict, it does not support the notion that female offending is usually an outcome of previous perpetration of violence by the victim. Only a few in the study were said to have cited self-defence, or long-term physical or psychological abuse, as a cause for generating their offence (Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003, p. 202). This issue will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Two Australian researchers concerned with homicide interviewed women directly about their circumstances and the situations that led them to commit murder. Walsh's (2006) study involved the examination of 43 women for homicide offences between 1991 and 2000. She gathered her information from public records at the Victoria Coroners Court and Supreme Court. The information was enhanced by accessing Victoria Police's LEAP database, which is the police database that holds all information regarding offences and offenders processed in Victoria (Walsh, 2006, p. 42). Walsh also interviewed three women in prison. Her findings present a strong relationship between a woman's experiences of disadvantage and their introduction to offending and continued participation in criminal activity (Walsh, 2006, p. 105). She also argues that not all female perpetrated homicide originates in domestic violence. Her research revealed that the largest grouping of victims was friends, acquaintances and neighbours, who accounted for 46.5 per cent of the total victims. This result, while not typical in homicide research involving women as offenders, is consistent with the findings of

Kirkwood (2000). If Walsh (2006) was to include children and other family members, the total number of victims killed in her study who were intimates and family members would total 48.7 per cent. This is not to dispute her analysis, but rather to suggest that women, too, killed a significant proportion of victims who were family or intimate others.

Similar to Walsh (2006), Whitely (2012) interviewed women who had been sentenced for murder and were incarcerated in the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Melbourne. Whitely (2012) interviewed a total of seven women. Three of these women killed acquaintances and four killed family members. The key aim of Whitely's (2012, p. 19) study was to 'recognise how women who kill construct their identities and with which discourses they identify and with which they reject'. The court viewed all of these women as violent offenders who had planned to kill (Whitley, 2012, p. 243). However, according to the interviews, all of the women distanced themselves from this identity, portraying their offending as located in their victim status and/or claiming their innocence and victimisation by the justice system. Whitely (2012, p. 238) reluctantly agreed with the court determination, stating that all of the women, while not intentionally wanting to kill, made rational choices to violently offend.

Other Australian studies have analysed court records as their primary source.

Robertson-Stainsby (2011) examined the court transcripts of 19 homicide cases of female offenders finalised in the Queensland Supreme Court between 1997 and 2002, aiming to contribute to existing theories of courtroom discourse. In this research she sought to identify how the courtroom accounts shaped understandings of women and homicide (Robertson-Stainsby, 2011, p. 234). According to Robertson-Stainsby (2011, p. 243), all of the women had a dominant story of volition told in court. She argued that if you

removed discussion of the relationship between the accused and deceased, stories of volition become clearer (Robertson-Stainsby, 2011, p. 243). Similar to Mouzos (2003) and Kirkwood (2002), her study argues that women's offending is not always about reactive violence. Women, according to Robertson-Stainsby (2011, p. 246), can act in calculated and rational ways in choosing to violently offend. Robertson-Stainsby (2011, p. 244) also found that women killed for a variety of reasons, including calculated acts of revenge in which women took the initiative to inflict the fatal blow, and honour killings.

In summary, in this discussion of Australian and relevant international research into women and homicide has been identified, with an emphasis on research into women who kill non-family. Overwhelmingly, men are the dominant perpetrators in homicide research. Of the research available on women and homicide, studies primarily focus on women who kill family members, with substantial evidence suggesting that their offending is based on their victimisation and experiences of inequality and oppression. However, recent studies in Australia indicate that women kill in diverse circumstances and their violence is not always victim precipitated. There is also emerging evidence that women kill violently, and can respond in calculated ways and in rage to conflict and disagreements.

Understanding motivation in homicide

Understanding motivation is critical in comprehending the nature of the homicide event. However, the task of classifying motive is considered problematic in homicide research. The origins of this problem are said be rooted in the classification of motive developed by Wolfgang (1958) (Brookman, 2005; Daly & Wilson, 1998; Wallace, 1996). Although considered flawed, Wolfgang's (1958) classifications remain influential in contemporary

homicide research (Brookman, 2005; Daly & Wilson, 1998; Mann, 1996). While Wolfgang's list of categories is sufficiently broad to capture most cases, he fails to address the substantive issues inherent in a homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1998, p. 172). This has inspired other researchers to construct a list of categories that operate within the fields of spontaneity versus premeditation and victim and offender relationships (Daly & Wilson, 1998, p. 173). Although these fields are constant in homicide research, there is a tremendous diversity and qualitatively distinct factors across relationships and circumstances in homicidal violence (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Wallace, 1986). Although the violence in any homicide event invariably arises because of a conflict, the motivation can be bound in multiple disagreements (Daly & Wilson, 1998, p. 174). In this sense, homicide is not a singular event, but rather a series of events or triggers that lead to the unlawful death of another (Mouzos, 2005, p. 19).

In homicide research there is usually a distinction made between instrumental and expressive forms. Instrumental homicide is a planned, purposeful attack, while expressive homicides are characterised as unplanned offences that arise out of anger, frustration or rage (Brookman, 2005, p. 47; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004, pp. 101–102). In planned murders, the perpetrator intends to kill their victim, while in unplanned homicides the assault is usually of a spontaneous nature (Brookman, 2005, pp. 280–281). The majority of homicide incidents are unplanned attacks, resulting from people responding to situations in an unpremeditated manner (Daly & Wilson, 1988, p. 173; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004, p. 257; Wallace, 1986, p. 179). In the literature revenge killings are associated with planned homicides and confrontational homicides are linked to unplanned homicides (Brookman, 2005, p. 48). Both these scenarios are typically described in male-on-male homicide incidents (Brookman, 2005; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004; Mouzos, 2000; Polk, 1994).

Not least because women's homicide is an uncommon event, popular explanations of what motivates a woman to kill tend to be based on longstanding myths and stereotypes of the evil, deviant or bad woman (Chan, 2001, pp. 22-23). According to Chan, (2001, p. 22) these characterisations resurrect an image of women's violence as pathological in contrast to the image of men's violence being a normal part of what men do. Added to these characterisations is a discourse primarily engendered by feminists seeking justice for women victims of male violence, which emphasises female victimhood and insists on her powerlessness (Morrissey, 2003, p. 25). Under this portrayal of female violence, the female killer is cast as a passive agent, at the mercy of a tragic event, and either not knowing what she is doing or being forced to participate by a male accomplice (Morrissey, 2003, p. 34).

According to Banwell (2010, p. 117), we need to move beyond dichotomising women's motivations as either self-defensive or retaliatory, as some women can be both victim and agent. Acknowledging agency is about recognising that women's choices are mediated by a set of social constraints that limit their opportunities (Banwell, 2010, p. 117). Chan (2001, p. 34) also suggests that we should not be making choices as to whether women's violent behaviour is rooted in either biological or socially constructed explanations. Her view is that we should displace this dichotomy with an alternative discourse, positioning women as anchored across a number of identities (Chan, 2001, p. 35).

Pearson (1997), too, exposes the fragility of feminist discourse in its engagement with female criminal behaviour. She argues that the political agenda of second wave feminism to recast violent women as victims acting to self-protect disallows the view that women have the capacity to be powerful and harming of others (Pearson, 1997, p.

30). Pearson (1997) argues that women do choose to use violence to solve their problems, and that to dismiss their behaviour as deranged does a disservice to those wishing to 'claim their violent behaviour as their own'. According to Pearson (1997) it makes no sense to talk of all women's violence as morally innocent. Chan (2001) similarly argues that by holding on to certain views of womanhood, and refusing to believe that women are anything but passive and gentle, we deny women's aggression and the range of emotions women may experience (Chan, 2001, p. 27). Further, by focusing on women's murderous behaviour as pathological, we both neglect and deny their potential criminal intentions (Chan, 2001, p. 25). Morrissey (2003, pp. 52-53) also makes the important point that it does not make sense to silence women's malicious and intentional violence, as feminist jurisprudence is also about acknowledging the full gamut of women's desires, abilities and acts. She argues that the victim theses used in feminist legal discourse potentially activate disempowering stereotypes of women (Morrissey, 2003, p. 22). Morrissey (2003, p. 21) further states that it is paradoxical that feminist revisions of the female criminal are based on tales of her victim status, as feminist arguments in the law have emphasised that unless 'women's power of reason, rationality and moral thought are judged equivalent to those of the male' then women lack acknowledgement as fully human subjects, a position which is traditionally granted to men. Morrissey (2003, p. 176) subsequently argues for more agentic narratives of female violence.

As previously stated, analyses of criminal behaviour are mainly based on the criminal behaviour of men, thus explanations of female offending have been adapted from male-orientated learnings (Brookman, 2005; Blanchette & Brown, 2006; Chan, 2001; Ogle et al., 1995). Although there remains a concern regarding the lack of theoretical frameworks and language to understand the nature of women's violence (Brookman, 2005; Chan,

2001), there is a growing body of research undertaken by feminist criminologists which has focused on the specific experiences of women as both victims and offenders (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 4).

It is widely accepted that when women kill in the context of intimate relationship abuse, they are driven by self-protection and defensive motives against threatening behaviour by males (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2002; Mann, 1996; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). Supporting this dominant view of female offending, Mann (1996, p. 174) found the motivations of women to be grouped into two broad categories of not responsible and responsible, with the most frequent motives including self-defence, claims of innocence and emotional factors to explain their lethal actions. Emotional factors were distinguished by rage, jealousy, anger and revenge and psychological motives were related to mental ill health (Mann, 1996, p. 174). Mouzos (2003, p. 2) reports on motivations of women who kill within the family circle and she found that women killed to self-protect from physical and/or sexual assault, killed out of jealousy or in a state of rage, with some women killing during delusional episodes.

In contrast, Kirkwood's (2000, p. 181) study revealed that women who killed a friend or acquaintance did so 'to defend their pride and sense of self'. Kruttschnitt's (2009, p. 82), examination of empirical evidence on gender and violence also found that when women are involved in non-domestic assaults their motivations, like those of men, are around vindication and to restore their personal integrity. Mann (1996) used a category of 'senseless murder' to describe those cases which involved 'simple meanness' or sociopathic behaviour. In addition, Mouzos (2003, p. 253) has described aberrant cases as those which involved the offender suffering mental ill health.

As previously noted, Mouzos (2003) found there were varying reasons for women killing non-family. There were also distinctions in their motivations when killing non-related males and non-related females. When killing non-related males, the motivations were based on resolving conflicts, disagreements, debts and other wrongdoings that occurred within the themes of prior criminal activity, illicit drug markets, drug addictions, prostitution and bad debts (Mouzos, 2003, p. 252). However, there were distinctive differences when a woman killed a female on her own or with other offenders. When killing a female with others, the killing was to enact revenge for a perceived wrongdoing or the killing occurred in the context of a criminal activity (Mouzos, 2003, p. 215). When killing a non-related female on their own they did so either out of jealousy, to eliminate a sexual rival, or the killing occurred as a result of an argument that spontaneously erupted (Mouzos, 2003, p. 215). Other motivations for women killing non-related females were related to a psychiatric illness (Mouzos, 2003, p. 215).

As this discussion reveals, there are varied motivations for women killing. In intimate partner homicides motivations were more likely to be centred on defence and self-protection. In contrast, when women kill non-family they not only kill as a result of a grievance, but also as a way to leverage control in the disagreement and to avenge their perceived loss. When women kill non-family their motivations are also enmeshed in scenarios of criminal activity.

Homicide and economic and social disadvantage

Australian and international research consistently finds that both male and female homicide offenders come from disadvantaged backgrounds, both socially and

economically (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Polk, 1994; Mann 1996). Women who kill are reported as suffering the stresses of poverty, unemployment and pressures on them as women (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Walsh, 2006). Walsh (2006, p. 121) also argues that limited access to educational opportunities and good role models significantly add to the inability of young women to lead 'lawful' lives. The combinations of various disadvantages which characterise their lives have been considered to be a key of cause why women kill (Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Kirkwood, 2003).

Homicide and mental ill health

Fundamental in criminological discourse is a tendency to equate female homicide with mental ill health. However, there is conflicting evidence in the literature about whether mental ill health is an important factor in homicide. For example, Brookman (2005, p. 89) argues that very few people with mental ill health commit homicide. Feminists such as Kirkwood (2000) also report very few women in her study killing as a result of clinically diagnosed psychological illness. Wallace (1996, p. 181) found that the majority of offenders did not have either a psychiatric history or mental disorder. However, other evidence indicates otherwise. For example, research undertaken in Finland suggests that 'the risk of committing a homicide was about 10 times greater for schizophrenia patients of both genders' (Eron et al., 1996, p. 83). Australian research also supports this link between mental ill health and homicide (Mouzos, 2003, 2005; Bennett et al., 2012). Research undertaken by Mouzos, (2005, p. 11) revealed that between 2003 and 2004, 7 per cent of victims of homicide were killed by an offender with a mental health disorder. Although Mouzos (2005) does not differentiate between

male and female offenders, the findings indicate that mental health is a factor in some cases of homicide.

A study undertaken in Victoria, focused on psychotic disorders among female homicide offenders between 1997 and 2005, also supports this relationship between mental ill health and homicide. Bennett et al. (2012, pp. 235–239) reported a higher rate of female homicide offenders having a psychotic illness when compared to the general population than for male homicide offenders when compared to the general population. Of those women with a prior diagnosis of psychosis, nearly all had a long history of contact with mental health services and there was evidence of a high rate of coexisting substance abuse (Bennett et al., 2012, pp. 240–241). This evidence of psychiatric disturbance is supported by Mouzos's (2003, p. 201) study on female homicide offenders. She found that across all types of victim–offender relationships, some people who kill are delusional at the time (Mouzos, 2003, p. 201). Other Australian research also reports that among violent female offenders, mental health problems were significantly higher than in the general population (Johnson, 2004, p. 84).

Although some studies refute the assumption that homicide is linked to the mental health of the offender, evidence from Bennett's (2012) study suggests it is a possible causative factor in women's violent offending. Understanding this factor could lead to improved assessment and treatment of women who have already committed violent offences. In sentencing offenders with mental health impairment in Victoria, the Verdins principle, which was applied in 2007, must be considered at the time of sentencing and/or at the time of their offence (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2012). The Verdins principle came into effect following a case in Victoria involving appeals by three offenders against their sentences (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2012). In that

case the Court of Appeal considered the three cases together and identified at least five ways in which mental impairment was relevant to sentencing (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2012; Walvisch, 2010, p. 187). These included: offender's moral culpability; the kind of sentence that could be imposed; moderating or eliminating the need for general and specific deterrence; increasing the hardship experienced by an offender through imprisonment; and justifying a less severe sentence (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2012; Walvisch, 2010, pp. 187-188). Since the introduction of the Verdins principle judges are now likely to give greater weight to community protection in sentencing offenders with mental impairment who have committed crimes that are particularly grave (Walvisch, 2010, p. 197).

The use of alcohol and drugs in homicide

Australian and international research attests to the fact that alcohol and drugs are prominent precipitating factors in homicide (Brookman, 2005; Chan & Payne, 2013; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann 1996; Mouzos, 2003, 2005; Polk, 1994; Vireuda & Payne, 2010). In the most recent report from the Australian Institute of Criminology, alcohol consumption by the offender or victim preceded almost half of all homicide incidents, with illicit drug use preceding one in five incidents, with the victim's use more predominant than the offender's (Chan & Payne, 2013, pp. 16-17). This is supported by research undertaken in Scotland in 2000, which concluded that over half of those accused of murder were classified as drunk, with a further 13 per cent under the influence of one or multiple drugs (Brookman, 2005, p. 44).

Australian research indicates that males are more likely to use alcohol than female offenders. However, more females than males are likely to have consumed both alcohol

and drugs prior to a homicide (Mouzos, 2005, p. 15). Recent Australian research on alcohol and homicide has also found that homicides involving strangers and friends are more likely to be characterised as alcohol related (Dearden & Payne, 2009, p. 5). While Dearden and Payne's (2009) study did not provide a gendered analysis, the research suggests, as in Kirkwood's study (2000), that female homicides that do not involve intimate others are likely to be alcohol related. Mouzos (2003, p. 28) also reported that the presence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs can fuel conflicts and disagreements which lead to homicide. Mouzos (2003, p. 202) observed that alcohol use was more prevalent when females, who killed a female, were involved with multiple others than when they killed females on their own.

International studies also report drugs and alcohol playing a significant role in female-perpetrated intimate partner homicides (Parker & Auerhahn, 1999, p. 181). Research in Finland supports this view of alcohol as being a risk factor in the violent offending of women. In Weizmann-Henelius et al.'s (2009, p. 15) study of women in Finland incarcerated in 1999 and 2000 for homicide and other violent offending, 81.7 per cent had been intoxicated at the time of their offences. Mann (1996, p. 54) too reported a link between the use of alcohol and homicide: over one-third of women homicide offenders in her study had been drinking before the murder and 46.7 per cent of victims were under the influence of alcohol. She also found that 12.6 per cent of female offenders were known to be drug users and their victims were considerably more likely to be so as well (Mann, 1996, pp. 59-61). Mann (1996, p. 6) concludes that the presence of alcohol and drugs creates a social situation in which both the victim and offender are compromised. Mann (1996, p. 56) also found in her study that drug-related homicides were 'particularly heinous'.

Women killing on their own or with others

When women killed within the family they were likely to kill on their own (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2002; Mouzos, 2003, p. 190). In contrast, Mann (1996) found that when women killed a stranger for economic reasons, they did so with a co-perpetrator; however, if they killed an acquaintance as a result of some form of provocation they acted alone. Her study also found that when women killed other females they did so on their own, claiming either self-defence, that it was an accident or that they were innocent (Mann, 1996, p. 102). Kirkwood (2000, pp. 173–174), while reporting women as killing across a number of scenarios, including with co-perpetrators, found that no woman acted on her own in the killing of a person not well known to her. Mouzos (2003 p. 190), too, found that when a woman killed either a non-related female or non-related male they were more likely to do so in concert with another offender.

Other research suggests that women are less likely to lead or participate in groups and proposed that, in the execution of serious crime, women do so under the urgings of a male criminal (Steffensmeier, p. 13.) In the case of serial killers, there is evidence that women are entrapped in emotional abuse and servitude by the men (Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). In the case of those women involved in serial killings, their love and need to be with the man often translates into the acceptance of despicable behaviours to appease him. However, much of this literature also talks about how the women, despite their entrapment, are willing to participate in the various kidnaps and murders of victims. Mouzos (2003, p. 202) provided evidence in her study suggesting that men had a coercive influence over the women involved in homicide.

The use of weapons in homicide

In Australia the primary cause of death results from stab wounds, with the victim being killed by a knife or other sharp instrument, followed by assaultive force through the use of hands and feet, with gunshot wounds being the third most common cause of death (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 11; Mouzos, 2005, p. 12; Mouzos, 2000, p. 41; Viruda & Payne, 2010, p. 13). Other causes of death include strangulation, a lethal injection of drugs or poison, smoke inhalation/burns, drowning and criminal neglect (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 12; Mouzos, 2000, p. 41; Viredua & Payne, 2010, p. 13).

Women use multiple methods to kill their victims. However, the primary cause of death for victims of female homicide is stab wounds (Brookman, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). In the literature on women who kill their intimate partner, women are reported as using knives or other sharp instruments as a method of killing (Mann, 1996; Kirkwood, 2000; Polk, 1994). Mouzos (2003) found that women were more likely to kill both males and females with a knife or sharp instrument in other forms of homicide. When females killed females, Mouzos (2003, p. 192) found that the second most common method of killing was assaultive force, followed by the use of firearms. In contrast, when females killed males, Mouzos (2003, p. 218) found only two women who used assaultive force.

Firearms are also increasingly being used by women in countries where guns are accessible (Brookman, 2005, pp. 164-165; Kruttschnitt, 2008, p. 28; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2000, p. 41). However, the use of firearms among all offenders in Australia is not as prevalent as in the US (Mouzos, 2000, p. 42). Since 1989, homicides resulting from the

use of a firearm have decreased, while the number of homicides involving the use of knives have increased (Chan & Payne, 2013, p. 14).

Other scenarios in which women kill

Consideration is now given in more detail to the dominant expressions of women's homicidal behaviour. These include scenarios of women who kill their abusive partners, and the killing of children. The circumstances in both scenarios and the different theoretical explanations for their offending are examined. Rare scenarios including serial and multiple female killers are also explored to further understand the full array of circumstances in which women kill. This discussion is important to learn more about the nature of brutal killing amongst women.

Women who kill an intimate partner or family member

Domestic violence is one of the most persistent forms of violence experienced by women (Block, 2009; Moe, 2004; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). Feminist research in this area is part of a broader feminist platform aiming to expose, challenge and prevent men's violence towards women and children (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 13; Seal, 2010, p. 2). Over one-third of women in Australia experience violence during their lifetime from their intimate partner (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004, p. 3). The health and emotional burden of male violence for women is profound and the effects can be long term. The existing framework of research into domestic homicide consistently states that women's use of violence is directly related to her victimised status (Banwell, 2010, p. 117). Women who kill their intimate partners, it is argued, have usually endured years of physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse by their partners (Easteal, 1991; Morgan,

2002; Polk, 1994; Strang, 1991; Wallace, 1986). Feminists have sought to contextualise domestic homicides by women through explanation of the social factors of women who kill (Chan, 2001, p. 16). The motivations for women killing their intimate partner are linked to self-defence and self-preservation for herself and her children (Banwell, 2010, p. 117; Bradfield, 2001, p. 145).

Researchers argue that the nature of the abuse destroys a woman's sense of self-worth and can cause depression and a sense of learned helplessness (Bradfield, 2002, p. 180; Eastal, 1991, p. 38; Kennedy, 2000, p. 157). The concept of learned helplessness was first coined by Lenore Walker (1989) to help explain why women do not leave a violent partner. In her account, a woman learns that she is unable to predict the efficacy of her own behaviours in changing her circumstances, as she is unable to alter the behaviour of her abuser. Therefore, she will choose behaviours that are more familiar or predictable (Walker, 1989, pp. 49–51). Subsequently, a woman chooses to stay rather than leave her partner as to do so would be entering a domain that is unknown to her (Walker, 1989, p. 51). Kennedy (2000, p. 157) too argues there is a time when a woman's usual strategies for coping can no longer sustain her, and she may feel she cannot cope any longer and have a genuine fear that she 'will end up dead or have a breakdown'. More recent research into intimate partner violence informs us that this fear of the unknown is justified as women are at greater risk of being killed when they leave their violent partners (Bradfield, 2002; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004, p. 50). While the term helplessness depicts bleakness and women's passivity, the behaviour of women in staying is also about their capacity for making strategic decisions concerning their safety and the safety of their children.

Some authors argue that without understanding women's violence as a form of self-defence or a response to years of abuse, the law potentially further victimises and harms women (Easteal, 1991; Saunders, 2002). Studies in the US have demonstrated an increase in the number of women arrested for domestic violence following the adoption of mandatory arrest policies in some jurisdictions (Saunders, 2002, p. 1426). The framing of these laws has determined that both genders are equally responsible for and capable of violence, and that men's and women's violence need to be treated similarly (Shaw & Dubois, 1995, p. 1). Some critics argue that this demonstrates a lack of insight into the motivations of women who commit acts of violence and trivialises their experiences of abuse (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. 143). Men who are violent towards their partners, they argue, do so to control and dominate them, while women mainly respond with violence because they are no longer able to cope with either the physical or psychological abuse (Quaid & Itzin, 2000, p. 154). In addition to enduring extraordinarily terrifying and brutal abuse, women who kill are also likely to sense a loss of control in their abuser and experience an escalation of fear (Saunders, 2013, p. 302; Walker, 1989, pp. 104–105).

As a way to defend women who kill their violent partners, a feminist legal strategy emerged in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and England called the 'battered woman syndrome' to be used in courts to provide evidence of the impact on women living in violent relationships (Bradfield, 2002, p. 180). In Australia, the first case in which this defence was accepted was in 1991 (Bradfield, 2002, p. 180). The syndrome addresses the question as to why women do not leave their circumstances as opposed to killing their partner. Under this explanation, violent acts perpetrated in domestic scenarios are also understood not to be discrete, but connected and ongoing (Bradfield, 2000, p. 178;

Easteal, 1991; Kennedy, 2000). The syndrome describes the psychological distortion impacting on thoughts, perceptions and capacity of women in abusive relationships to realistically appraise their circumstances (Bradfield, 2002, p. 180). Rather than asking *why* battered women do not leave, the more pertinent question is *what* and *who* prevents them from leaving (Bradfield, 2003; Block, 2009). According to Bradfield (2002, p. 183), the preoccupation with why women do not leave obscures the power dynamics of a violent relationship.

The battered-woman-syndrome defence allows expert witnesses to explain how a woman may understand her experiences of abuse. The benefit of the syndrome is that it allows an understanding of the individual circumstances of a woman, and the social constraints, which impede her leaving her violent partner. However, there are detractors of the battered woman syndrome, with some feminists arguing that the syndrome locates women as potentially weak, passive and mentally unstable. The idea that women's behaviour is reasonable and strategic is negated through an adherence to this position. It is argued that a framework which explains the social and economic position of women living in violent relationships provides evidence of the circumstances leading to the homicide event (Toole, 2012, p. 7). It is also now accepted that women exercise agency and resist violence in multiple and strategic ways (Banwell, 2010, p. 118). In this scenario, learned helplessness is more about survival and a strategy for knowing 'when the life-threatening behaviour has come with the batterer she knows so intimately' (Kreneck quoted in Bungay, 1998, p. 174).

Australian courts tend to rely less on the battered wife syndrome than on a provocation defence. Until recently this was problematic, as state legislation required that the accused had to be acting on an immediate incident. Recent changes to the law

introduced through the *Crimes (Homicide) Bill 2005* in Victoria provide some hope that women who kill their abusive partners will be legally protected (Toole, 2012, p. 2; Victorian Government, 2005b). However, investigation into the four women who have been charged with killing abusive family members since 2005 in Victoria suggests that the new law has the potential to both 'unfairly advantage and unfairly disadvantage women' (Toole, 2012, p. 10). It is Toole's (2012, p. 20) view that the efficacy of the new codification of self-defence is limited because it relies on the belief that the behaviour of abused women is not reasonable. She argues for the law to be more closely monitored to effectively create equality in the law for women (Toole, 2012, p. 21).

Although the research about the battered woman syndrome has been particularly useful in offering a theoretical framework for understanding the predominately intimate nature of women's lethal violence, as argued earlier, some feminists are cautious of approaches which locate women's violence as emanating solely from their victim status. Victimization alone does not define the individual and runs the risk of erasing their agency (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, pp. 15-16). As previously stated, the victim theses also potentially trigger disempowering stereotypes of women (Morrissey, 2003, p. 22). In her examination of the life stories of three women who used violence in their marital relationships, Banwell (2010) found that the women consciously deployed violence as rational and pragmatic solutions to the situations in which they found themselves. Studies also indicate that some women who kill their intimate partner do so out of women's self-interest, for example, in the arena of financial reward or sexual gain (Brookman, 2005, p. 170; Chan, 2001).

Women who kill their children

In this section neonaticide, infanticide and filicide are described and how they are understood in theories of female offending. There is a dominant view that women who kill their children are mentally unwell or emotionally overwhelmed from their parental responsibilities (Lambie, 2001; Motz, 2001). However, there is historical data and current research which exposes a more agentic narrative of women who kill their children, arguing that some women act rationally and decisively when killing their children (Gartner & McCarthy, 2006; Saunders, 2013).

Neonaticide is the death of an infant either during or immediately after birth (Mouzos, 2000, p. 132). Infanticide is the killing of a child under the age of one by the mother (Mouzos, 2000, p. 132). According to the *Victorian Crimes Act 1958*, a woman is guilty of infanticide if she 'carries out conduct that causes the death of her child...and, at the time of carrying out the conduct, the balance of her mind was disturbed' (Victorian Government, 2005a). Filicide describes the killing of a child over one day in age and is inclusive of paternal murder. Filicides are often committed in response to a separation from a partner and are motivated with an intention to cause harm to the other parent (Kirkwood, 2012, p. 7). Men are predominately the main perpetrators in retaliatory filicide, thus reflecting gendered patterns of intimate partner violence (Kirkwood, 2012, p. 80).

Historically there were a number of reasons as to why women either killed or abandoned their children. They could be killed either out of economic necessity or because the child compromised their livelihood, the social stigma attached to birthing an

illegitimate child or simply that the child was not wanted (Korbin, 1989; Lambie, 2001; Motz, 2001). Children with a disability or girls were at a greater risk of infanticide. The killing of babies by women was in fact tolerated up until the 19th century with women rarely being convicted (Lambie, 2001, p. 73).

In previous centuries many women were living in circumstances where they were easily exploited and available contraception was primitive and unreliable. Many women for whom unwanted pregnancy was a serious burden actively sought to dispose of their child (Lambie, 2001; Motz, 2001, p. 143). Similar circumstances shape the decisions of young women to kill their children today (Fitzroy, 2003; Lambie, 2001; Motz, 2001).

Consistent with current homicide legislation across countries dealing with mothers who murder is the shared view of psychological disturbance (Lambie, 2001, p. 75; Wallace, 1996). Some psychological theorising describes neonaticide as 'hysterical denial of pregnancy' (Motz, 2001). Although only a small proportion of women are motivated to kill their infants, the stigma attached to being a single parent and having to bear the economic burden of parenting alone can threaten the emotional stability of some women. The cases where women kill their children usually result from an inability to cope with the pressure of childrearing and / or feelings of being submerged by the burden of motherhood (Motz, 2001; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). In some cases, they form part of a suicide plan (Mouzos, 2003, p. 173; Polk, 1994, p. 147). According to Motz (2001) greater recognition of how social conditions contribute to maternal depression and stress for parents is important for understanding why women kill their children. In this narrative, women's killing is linked to their victimisation.

Feminist criminologists have challenged these portrayals of the mother being overwhelmed, stressed and 'victims of circumstance and larger structural forces' (Gartner & McCarthy, 2006, p. 91). These theses did not allow for a presentation of a woman who is violent and rational (Gartner & McCarthy, 2006, p. 91). According to Gartner and McCarthy (2006, p. 96), research into historical records show that some women act rationally and decisively when killing their children. Saunders (2013) too contests the view that women who kill their children are mentally unwell or distressed from their parental responsibilities. The contemporary case of Kelli Lane, who was charged and found guilty of killing her baby daughter and hiding her body, did not fit either the stereotype of the poverty stricken and desperate, young, uneducated woman nor was she suffering from a psychiatric illness. Rather, the judge in his sentencing found her actions were premeditated, without remorse and involved multiple deceptions (Saunders, 2013, p. 109).

Rare circumstances in which women commit serial and multiple murders

There is historical evidence of women who actively choose to participate in the torture of others, including acts of sexual sadism (Cameron & Wykes, 2011; Davis, 2001; Kirsta, 1994, pp. 170-171; Morrissey, 2006; Seal, 2010; Tammé, 2009). Some of this literature is based on criminological theories of profiling. Profiling is used to list the characteristics and typologies of different forms of murderers and fits within a framework of psychological investigation into human behaviour. Case studies written by journalists and academics are also examined. Despite varying degrees of analysis, common themes were found in the circumstances of the women and the crimes they have each committed.

Located in the stories of female serial and multiple killers are similar family backgrounds. The majority of the women who kill in these scenarios are reported as being scarred by the abuses of their parents and as having experienced profoundly disturbing sexual assaults as children (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004; Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). They lived in families that failed to provide a loving and nurturing life. They also shared common experiences of abandonment and extreme isolation as children, which would have impeded their emotional and psychological stability.

Schurman-Kauflin (2000, p. 213), who profiled seven female serial killers in the US, argues that it is in these backgrounds of extreme abuse that predators are formed with little or no empathy for others. This inability to have a sense of empathy is also described by Dwyer and Miller (2006) in seeking to understand the violent offending of young women. Women serial and multiple murderers are also said to engage in violent fantasies arising out their emotional suffering and feelings of powerlessness as a child (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000, p. 191). Schurman-Kauflin (2000, p. 189) says the one motivating factor in all murders is the need for control. For each of the women in her study, their experiences of extreme abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional and emotional detachment and abandonment, led to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000, pp. 190–191). She describes these feelings as leading to anger and rage, with the female perpetrator repeatedly remembering her abuse, leading to increasing feelings of rage which eventually lead to the emergence of a violent fantasy. Fantasy for the female perpetrator continues for years and after she has tormented animals and children she turns her efforts to target a victim and then ultimately murder them (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000, p. 192).

Davis (2001, p. 250), in her study of 13 serial killers, agrees that these women were not raised in stable, loving homes and they were all brutalised as children. She utilised the theory of 'violentised' to understand the aggressive profiles of these women (Davis, 2001, p. 252). Davis (2001) says that what distinguishes these women from other abused children who have not transgressed into violent adults is that most have been socialised into aggressive behaviour and learn that violence settles disputes. In this model, the child initially learns to submit to an aggressor, she then moves on to mentally promise herself to join in at the next fight, and then learns that the person whom she has beaten either respects or fears her and finally, she decides that violence is what she will use to settle all of her disputes (Davis, 2001, p. 252). Abusive and poisonous behaviours of parents, she argues, turn children toward crime and, for some, murderous activities (Davis, 2001). Davis (2001) explains that all of the serial killers in her study had parents that 'mocked and hit their helpless offspring again and again'. She argues that the emotional pain and hurt caused by parents is what increases violent crime. In the theory of violentisation, the child or adult perpetrator can also be coached by a violent family member or partner to emulate their violent ways (Davis, 2001, pp. 253-254). Caution, however, should be exercised in accepting the inevitability of cycles of violence. Although there is a connection between effects of abuse and further abuse, it is difficult to attribute all the blame for the violence of these female killers to their parents. These explanations are also reliant on theories of social learning, whereby parents and society are to blame for producing violence in children.

As previously discussed, there is a growing body of feminist research which demonstrates that relying on stories of victimisation is inadequate for explaining women's violence. By relying on the victimisation of women in explanation of their offending we fail to see women as have agency, and being responsible and culpable for

their criminal actions (Daly, 2010; Denton, 2001; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Maher, 1997; Morrissey, 2003; Pearson 1997).

In addition to cases explored through psychological profiling, other case studies of women serial killers reveal reoccurring themes of detailed planning, sadistic gratification and excessive use of violence. Aileen Wuornos, Catherine Birnie and Myra Hindley were all convicted of murdering multiple victims. Wuornos was convicted and sentenced to death in the US for killing seven men. At the time, she was working as a prostitute and lured each man to a particular destination where she would shoot and kill them (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004). Birnie with her partner brutally kidnapped, repeatedly raped, tortured and sadistically killed four young women in Perth. The murders, according to Birnie, were planned thoroughly using research to educate themselves about how to execute the perfect murder (Cameron & Wykes, 2011, p. 15). Hindley with her partner kidnapped, raped and brutally killed five young victims in England (Davis, 2001, pp. 28-51). Davis (2001, p. 247), in her research of female serial killers, found that women who acted in concert with men were rarely compliant victims of their male partners.

There is evidence that Birnie and Hindley were in love with a dominant and sadistic man and were operating under his influence and directions. However, both women were actively engaged in the planning and execution of each murder, including the disposal of bodies and concealment of their crimes. These methods of killing and attention to planning detail are common themes among female serial killers (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000).

The value in exploring these cases is the understanding that some women will use excessive forms of violence. Although there is argument that their early lives embodied hardship and trauma, they have each decisively taken action in a planned way to sadistically torture and kill their victims. Morrissey (2003) and Seal (2010) argue that we cannot ignore these women, even if their actions are indefensible. It is important for feminists to further explore these scenarios of women's homicide in order to comprehend the agency of women who kill deliberately and brutally.

Conclusion

Over the last two decades researchers have challenged the earlier invisibility and marginalisation of women's offending in homicide research (Chan, 2001; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Morrissey, 2003; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). There has been a range of ideas and theories put forward by feminist scholars to advance our knowledge of the different expressions of women's violence, beyond portrayals of the victimised female offender (Carrington, 2013; Daly, 2008, 2010; Denton, 2001; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Miller 2002, 2004; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). This chapter has explored the expanding literature on women's violence and women's offending in the area of homicide.

In homicide research there is usually a distinction made between instrumental homicide, which is a planned, purposeful attack and expressive homicides which are characterised as unplanned offences that arise out of anger, frustration or rage (Brookman, 2005, p. 47; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004, pp. 101-102). Revenge killings are associated with planned

homicides and confrontational homicides are linked to unplanned homicides (Brookman, 2005, p. 48). The majority of homicide incidents are unplanned attacks, including among women, resulting from people responding to situations in an unpremeditated manner (Daly & Wilson, 1988, p. 173; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004, p. 257; Wallace, 1986, p. 179).

International research indicates that both male and female offenders come from disadvantaged backgrounds, both socially and economically (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Polk, 1994, Mann 1996). Alcohol and drugs are prominent precipitating factors in homicide, fuelling conflicts and disagreements, in both male and female homicides (Brookman, 2005; Chan & Payne, 2013; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann 1996; Mouzos, 2003, 2005; Polk, 1994; Vireuda & Payne, 2010).

There is conflicting evidence in the literature whether mental health is an important factor in homicide. Kirkwood (2000) and Wallace (1986) report few women offenders as having a psychiatric condition. However, Bennett's et al (2012) research on psychotic disorders among female homicide offenders suggests the mental ill health of the offender as being a possible causative factor in women's violent offending.

Of the studies conducted on women and homicide, the research to date has mostly focused on women who have killed their partners after suffering long histories of abuse, or on women who have killed their children (Mouzos, 2003, p. 11; Polk, 1997; Thorpe & Irwin, 1996, p. 6). In cases where women kill their children there is a shared view in the literature that these women have experienced a psychological disturbance and/or have been unable to cope with the pressures of childrearing (Lambie, 2001; Motz, 2001; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). However, there are also examples of relatively privileged

women who have killed their children, which brings into question this dominant view (Saunders, 2013). Research into historical records also challenges this portrayal of the mother being emotionally overwhelmed, arguing that some women act rationally and decisively when killing their babies (Gartner & McCarthy, 2006, p. 96).

In homicide research concerned with women killing their intimate partner, the prevailing view of women is that they are driven by defensive motives and are strongly provoked by their partner's abusive behaviours (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 2004; Schwartz, 2012). However, there are studies which contest the view that women's lethal violence in intimate relationships is always submissive or provoked in response to abuse (Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2001, 2003). Studies reveal that some women consciously deploy violence as a rational and pragmatic solution to the situations they are facing (Banwell, 2010). There are also women who kill their intimate partner out of self-interest in the arena of financial reward or sexual gain (Banwell, 2010; Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001).

Research informs us that women who kill non-family are rare. Therefore it is not surprising that these circumstances have had limited examination. Of those women who do kill in these circumstances, the evidence reveals a cohort of women who plan to kill, who murder brutally, and have little or no remorse. The research also tells us that when women kill non-family they not only kill as a result of a grievance, but also as a way to leverage control in the disagreement and to avenge their perceived loss (Kirkwood, 2002; Mouzos, 2003). When women kill non-family their motivations are also enmeshed in scenarios of criminal activity (Mann 1996; Mouzos, 2003). It is important to further explore these scenarios of women's lethal violence in order to comprehend this evidence of women who kill violently and deliberately.

A common theme in feminist theorising of female crime is the belief that the oppression of women plays a central role in the explanation and prediction of female crime (Blanchette & Brown, 2006, p. 35). Explanations of female killing are also predicated on this assumption. While this research has been important for clarifying the various dimensions of inequality and marginalisation experienced by women, they have limited efficacy in explaining women's violent offending. Understanding women's victimisation is important, but it is only a part of the story in explaining women's violent offending.

There is a growing body of feminist research raising caution around the victimology theses (Daly, 2008, 2010; Denton, 2001; Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Miller 2002, 2004; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997, Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). Although most of this research is not focused on homicide, it sheds light on women's violence. These authors argue that there is overlap between women's experiences of victimisation and criminal offending and that they are not distinctive experiences (Daly, 2010, p. 233). By concentrating on the victimisation of females in explaining female violence, they argue, feminists fail to see women as having agency, and being responsible and culpable for their criminal actions (Carrington, 2013; Daly 2010, p. 233; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Pearson 1997). This body of work recognises that women are active agents in their lives and while responding to constraints are also active decision makers (Heimer & Kruttschnitt, 2006, p. 3). There is also suggestion in the victimisation research that focusing on intimate partner violence as explanation of women's violence isolates the research on women's offending from the larger body of research on violence (Heimer & Kruttschnitt, 2006, p. 2).

There is also research focused on the specific experiences of women as both victims and offenders (Daly, 2008; Denton, 2001; Maher, 1997; Mason & Stubbs, 2010). This research reveals that women do engage in forms of resistance to their experiences of abuse and violence and operate with agency in their life choices and actions. For example, research into the violent offending of young women and women involved in the illicit drug economy challenge the portrayal of women as passive victims in their involvement in criminal activity. Despite their life constraints the research reports women were also negotiating, defining and contesting their life options (Daly, 2010; Denton, 2001; Maher, 1997, p. 206). The research also identifies women's involvement in illegal activity as being driven by their own criminal agency. Researchers also argue that neither the portrayal of women as victims or explanations of their criminal agency can adequately explain the complexities of women's offending (Daly, 2010; Maher, 1997)

Casting women as victims acting to self-protect also disallows the view that women have the capacity to be powerful and harming of others (Pearson, 1997, p. 30). As argued by Pearson (1997), some women choose to use violence to solve their problems. To deny their agency does a disservice to those wishing to claim their violent behaviour as their own. The research also tells us that women do not have to be victims of violence to be capable of violence (Daly, 2010).

Findings in this literature have implications for how we might pursue further knowledge on women's violent offending. Exploration of the motivations and circumstances in which women kill non-family may promote further understanding of the complex relations between their victimisation and their offending.

Chapter Three

Methodology and research methods

This study is an analysis of court transcripts of 14 murder cases concerning 18 women. The research aimed to improve understanding of women's violence and the lives that lead to this violence. In this chapter key features of feminist research are discussed and how these shaped the aspirations and initial choices in research methods. The pathway for decision-making around the research methodology, including the restrictions that were imposed, and the research methods actually used, are explained. In addition, due to the emotional impact of undertaking the research, engagement with therapeutic support and how it became a critical tool, are outlined. Finally, there is an exploration of the limitations of the research and the ethical considerations.

Feminist research and qualitative research

This research has been informed by feminism and is qualitative in its approach. Many influential feminist researchers have argued that most traditional methods of scientific enquiry are sexist (Fawcett & Featherstone, 2000; Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993). However, there is no universally accepted position on the question of eliminating sexism from research and, in describing feminist research, it is important to note there are a range of disparate and diverse views of what constitutes feminist research, if it exists and, if so, how it can be justified (Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Trinder, 2000). Feminist approaches in qualitative and critical research offer a rich contextual understanding of women's lives (Flavin, 2001).

This research is shaped by feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism. Feminist empiricists are critics of scientific methods and believe that with more women scientists involved in the discovery of knowledge, the sexist biases of research can be rectified. They are not about abandoning scientific enquiry but believe science can be done better (Birke, 2000, p. 587). The relationship with science became more complicated with the advances of second wave feminism, which was positioned against the emphasis on objectivity, quantification and control (Oakley, 1998, p. 133). Despite these challenges empirical work within criminology makes an important contribution to the production of data on women to analyse their victimisation, offending and engagement with the criminal justice system (Mason & Stubbs, 2010, p. 5).

Standpoint theory is informed by radical feminism with a focus on gender and a conviction that research is about politics and social change (Trinder, 2000). Feminist standpoint theorists were critical of feminist empiricists and argued that self-correction of methodology alone will not produce unbiased work (Snyder, 1995, p. 94).

Standpoint theorists instead suggested that knowledge experienced by women is scientifically preferable as it is less likely to be socially distorting (Harding, 1987, p. 185). According to Oakley (1998, p. 134), a feminist standpoint position argued for a science that respected the 'foundations of women's knowledge of the world and love of caring, for and about, others'. Also critical to the standpoint position is the view that the oppressed have a greater clarity and a more complete view of social reality (Trinder, 2000). Postmodern feminists critique standpoint theory on the grounds that there is no one woman's viewpoint, and that while women share oppression, the experiences of women are diverse and fractured due to different class, race, age and sexual identities (Snyder, 1995; Tong, 1998).

Despite the differences in approach, feminist research is distinguished by a number of key features. While not unique to feminism, they are in combination characteristic of a feminist approach. They include making women's concerns central, using research to make change in women's lives and listening to women's stories through empathetic dialogue. The principles of reflexivity and dialectical reasoning which enrich the gathering of knowledge, reflection and analysis are also central to feminist research (Bryman & Burgess, 1999; Mason & Stubbs, 2010; Reinharz, 1992).

Common to feminist methodology is the endeavour to 'breathe life' into the everyday experiences of women, and to provide information and research about things that are important to them (Harding, 1987, p. 4). Therefore, locating the concerns and issues of women as central is a critical part of feminist research (Fawcett & Featherstone, 2000; Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Tong, 1998; Trinder, 2000). This research first aimed to generate knowledge about the women who killed based on their own accounts of aspects of their lives that were important to them. I intended to elucidate the circumstances of a group of women who had been previously largely ignored and to enhance understanding of why they killed. Given the paucity of research into the subject of women's killing and the small amount of research which specifically included the voices of women who had killed outside the family, I initially thought this was an important objective of the study.

Second, consistent with the emancipatory goals of feminism, this study was concerned to ease the conditions of oppression and exploitation that it was believed the women in this study experienced. Aligned to other critical approaches the research aimed to provide opportunities for participants to have a better understanding of the social structures that impacted on their lives (Pease, 1996, p. 38). This feature of feminist

research is also shared with critical theorists who argue that people have the capacity to reflect, interpret and critique their own experiences in positive and affirming ways (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). This approach shaped the initial intention to interview women. By women telling their stories I thought it would offer a more complex understanding of the subject matter being studied. According to Maynes et al. (2008, p. 25), by drawing on their life experiences, participants create an understanding of the motivations that informed their actions. However, it was also important that the women in telling their stories were not exploited by the research process. It was important that the interview methods were also sensitive, non-exploitative and emancipatory in design.

The third characteristic of feminist research is its emphasis on empathetic dialogue (Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). Some feminists argue that injustices can be righted when people tell their stories (Reinharz, 1992, p. 136). However, as feminists often engaged in the lives of women who have suffered significant and multiple traumas and are highly vulnerable, asking women to recount these stories could be deemed an imposition. It is also asking women to speak about traumatic and distressing events and it takes much courage for them to do so. Feminist researchers subsequently endeavour to construct a conversation with women that enables them to construct their own ideas and thoughts as they listen to their stories with care and respect (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24). This dimension of feminist research has evolved enabling an exploration of how emotions and empathy impact in human interactions, and the way in which knowledge is shared and created through this interaction (Kvale, 1996, p. 293). However, others draw our attention to the notion that the practice of building trust and empathy in interviews does not necessarily equate to reliable, true, and singular perspectives and experiences (Trinder, 2000, p. 51). This does not mean that feminist researchers should

give up on capturing women's voices; it is about the researcher being able to account for the context and the discourses that the participant is using to position themselves (Trinder, 2000, pp. 51-52).

Another important feature of feminist research is the principle of reflexivity. Feminist research rejects the objectivist approach of traditional scientific models of inquiry, which make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible. In contrast to this position of seeing oneself sitting outside the research, feminists embrace principles of reflexivity, insisting that the researcher is immersed in the research process (Bryman & Burgess, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). In the application of this principle, it was important to acknowledge my own immersion in the research. The research process – and indeed the selection of the thesis topic itself – was being influenced and shaped by my reflections, experiences and knowledge, and consideration was given to how this knowledge and beliefs shaped the collection and interpretation of data. This immersion was a strength, which enabled me to explore issues unfolding at a deeper level. The challenge was also to monitor, reflect and encourage myself to act responsibly. This was achieved through regular supervision and counselling. Consultations with the Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) were critical in ensuring that I was both accountable and ethical in my actions. In turn, acknowledging my own immersion encouraged greater accountability.

Finally, the fifth feature of feminist research, dialectical reasoning, was also critical for reviewing the material being explored. Dialectical reasoning is used when trying to grasp the tension and connections between contradictions and seeing the elements of that dynamic as mutually constitutive (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 33-34). It demands back and forth reflection and a re-examining and re-focusing of key concepts to gain a

deep understanding (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 33-34; Sarankatakos, 1993, p. 63). In addition to exploring the relationship between positions or issues that seemed in conflict with one another, dialectical reasoning enabled me to reflect and make connections about and across themes, and reframe and re-examine the material (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Sarantakos, 1993, p. 63). Often it was difficult to view the women who are the subject of this thesis through a compassionate lens when I was faced with the overwhelming reality of the circumstances in which they killed. Dialectical reasoning subsequently became an important tool for helping me to ask new questions. This process of dialectical reasoning was an ongoing task, undertaken with both the counsellor engaged to support me through the research and with my supervisors. It became evident as time progressed that the analysis was part of a continuous spiraling cycle of reflections. The literature, my immersion in the data, the counselling and discussions with my supervisors, all contributed to forming important layers of knowledge, reflection and analysis.

The research design can be characterised as qualitative. Qualitative research is concerned with finding deep insight into social processes utilising the knowledge of the research participants; it is interested in flexibility, has concern with subjectivity and is sensitive to the different ways that social reality is constructed (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, pp. 144-145). These features of qualitative research are compatible with feminist goals (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Trinder, 2000). Feminist research also views theory and practice as connected (Snyder, 1995, p. 91). In designing the research methods, I intended to utilise a feminist framework of inquiry to challenge patriarchal ideologies on women's violence, to give meaning and voice to the different experiences and circumstances of women who have murdered, and to construct a process that was transparent, collaborative, supportive and responsible.

In the course of the PhD candidature, the aspirations for this study and knowledge of feminist methods of inquiry were constantly tested. There were frequent questions around whether the choice of methods was consistent with feminist research. This process was influenced by what Oakley (1998, p. 134) describes as the hegemonic correctness of qualitative methods of research, privileged in feminist debates about methodology. Having had previous success in developing collaborative models of enquiry shaped by feminist epistemologies, I thought that the research process would again be shaped by the methodologically innovative approaches used by feminists. As the journey unfolded, it became evident that my experiences of previous feminist endeavour would not be replicated. Despite initial disappointment, it became important to value the discovery of knowledge. Although not collaborative in the way I planned, and despite the fact that the absence of the women's voices could be construed as a presentation of an incomplete view, I believe that this did not make my research any less feminist.

Research process – thwarted attempts

This section discusses what I attempted to do: interview women who had killed, guided by a reference group. This was not to be. This account is provided as both a way of explaining the research process, but also as something of a cautionary tale about how difficult it is to tackle such a topic in this way.

Although this is not unique to feminist research, the need to use a range of methods was an important consideration in guiding my methodological preferences. It was originally planned to use multiple methods of qualitative data collection. The methods were to

include interviews with women who murdered, the establishment of a reference group to provide support and knowledge, and a review of court transcripts.

Interviewing and storytelling – techniques particularly important in feminist methodology – maximise the opportunity for active participation of women and also provide the chance for discussion and clarification of issues, helping capture people's ideas and thoughts in their own words (Kvale, 1996; Reinharz, 1992; Trinder, 2000). In the early stages of this study no other Australian research had been found based in interviewing women who had killed non-family only, so this was the task set for this study. Indeed, the interviewing of women for this study was considered critical, as women's perceptions and ideas about homicide have rarely been heard. I hoped to interview 10 to 15 women. However, efforts to interview were thwarted by repeated failures to secure permission from the Victorian Department of Corrections to have access to potential participants.

First endeavours were directed to the task of securing interviews with women either charged or convicted of homicide. Originally I intended to undertake a national study, interviewing women charged with murder, as there was yet no national study in which the experiences of women across Australia had been sought. After some time I realised that this would involve a time-consuming and complicated process of negotiating access to women in up to seven different jurisdictions. As I was already experiencing difficulties negotiating access to women in Victoria, I decided to focus my efforts on a study based in Victoria and, if necessary, extend the research to other states. However, eventually, this was also abandoned as I became aware of how difficult it would be to access women in the prison system.

The process for securing permission from the Department of Justice required an ethics application be submitted for review. However, the Department of Justice ethics committee would only accept applications if they had been approved initially by the Department of Corrections. This subsequently meant that the application had to be approved by the research committee of the women's prison. Numerous discussions with the research officer at the prison were unsuccessful. The application was disallowed, with the prison spokesperson stating that there was already another research project being undertaken in the prison. I was also advised that it was important to protect the women from being over researched and to protect their privacy, given women prisoners are such a small cohort.

After the first rejection of the application to the Department of Corrections to interview women, I decided to shift my focus to women post-release in the community. The establishment of the reference group, another key methodological choice, became critical, as members' contact with women post-release from prison could enable me to circulate information to potential interviewees. I had planned to utilise a model of collaborative learning, inviting critical and rigorous input from the community. Inspired by the principles of collective or collaborative action this aspect of the methodology was important. As a key feature or expression of feminist action it reflects a desire to work in non-hierarchical ways (Reinharz, 1992; Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986). My experience in the design and implementation of participatory research models, in both the education and welfare sectors, had provided evidence that collective sharing of knowledge and skills assist in the much broader platform of social change. As this research hoped to influence policy and practice outcomes for women, it was important to put in place a strategy which encouraged the input and support of others who could contribute to this process. I hoped that this strategy would facilitate more opportunities

for the research process to be continually self-reflecting. I also believed that a number of feminist services and community agencies assisting and supporting female offenders could benefit from the research through their participation and contribution to the dialogue on women's offending.

I planned to have the reference group available throughout the duration of the project and invite participants to attend one meeting every six months. I hoped that members would be available for individual consultation on particular areas which matched their level of expertise and experience. The reference group was to operate as a resource of support, providing information and knowledge on how to access the prison system, and other legal interventions and sources of information. I envisaged that members would provide commentary and insight on the themes and trends of the data being collected and their knowledge and experience of women's offending and of the criminal justice system and the prison culture would be highly valuable.

In attempts to establish the reference group a number of meetings were held with organisations to discuss the study and then a formal letter was sent inviting their participation. Despite very positive feedback, all agencies with the exception of one felt they had little experience to offer the project. The failure to establish the reference group was confirmed when no-one turned up to the inaugural meeting. This was very disappointing. Having worked successfully at establishing reference groups in the community sector for over 20 years this experience was new. I therefore decided it was important to direct my energies into actions that were going to be more effective. Subsequently, despite wanting to collaborate with people to assist in the process of critical thinking, this opportunity was not available.

Despite the first rejection from the Department of Corrections, another submission was made a year later. Unfortunately, the prison again rejected this application for similar reasons. Access to the prison was denied as renovations were being undertaken and the timing of my research would be disruptive. This meant that the application was never heard by the Department of Justice. This was a very troubling period as an original objective of the study was to give women offenders an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas. This objective had also been encouraged by staff from the Australian Institute of Criminology to conduct interviews with women as there had not been any other national study which had included their voices, and it could provide very important knowledge as to why women murder in these circumstances. Therefore, it was with great reluctance that applications to undertake interviews with women were stopped.

The failure to establish the reference group and failure to gain permission from the Department of Corrections also thwarted plans to shift focus to interview women in the community. Without permission from the Department of Justice, interviewing women in the community was also not possible, as it was assumed many would still be on parole and therefore in a legal relationship with the Department.

It was at this point in the research that discussions with both supervisors were critical. In addition to the problems of accessing women, it was becoming clear through the reading of the court summaries of potential cases that some of these women may not be reliable in their storytelling. The position of the subjugated is not always innocent (Haraway, 1998, p. 584). This was a powerful moment in the research when the decision to exclude interviews with women was finalised. While disappointed by the response

of the Department of Corrections, the decision was made as a result of a number of factors. Through discussions with both supervisors it became clearer that it was possible that the women may not be entirely honest in their interviews. Potentially these women may have used the interview opportunity to rehearse their own story to secure their freedom and protest their innocence. It was important to consider that the women were not innocent. This position felt uncomfortable and it was difficult for me to challenge the idea that women's crimes could be precipitated by other than their victim status. Therefore while interviewing women may have provided a better understanding of their position of oppression and their decisions to kill, it was important to acknowledge that their stories would have required some degree of deciphering and critical examination.

There were also discussions around my own safety. In addition to the security risks of interviewing these women, there were also risks associated with some of the women who had committed their murders in concert with men who were highly malicious in the execution of the murders. There was subsequently a genuine need to think about future safety, as there was potential exposure to dangerous circumstances. It was also important to think of the safety of one of my supervisors as she had offered to accompany me to the interviews to provide additional support.

Research process – data sources and their analysis

In the end, the research methods were restricted to the review and analysis of court transcripts from the Victorian Magistrates' Court, the Victorian Supreme Court, Victorian County Court and the Victorian Court of Appeal and in one case the High Court of Australia. In February 2007, before it became apparent that women would not

be interviewed or a reference group formed, the task of determining the court cases to be reviewed commenced. To do so, I reviewed the judgments and sentencing summaries supplied through the AustiLII (Australasian Legal Information Institute) database.

Case selection

The original plan was to study all homicides by women who killed non-family across Australia. Using AustiLII from February 2005 to December 2007, I undertook a search for 'homicide' in all Australian jurisdictional databases. In Victoria a total of 224 cases of homicide were identified. Of these 224 a total of 24 cases involved women. However, it was evident that not all could be included in the study, with only 12 considered possible cases. The others involved either women involved in domestic homicide including contract killing of a spouse, assisting the offender of a homicide or infanticide. It had also become apparent there were some cases where the act of assisting the offender involved very violent behaviour. This was a constant tension in the selection of cases. The more case summaries I read, the more it became evident that across a number of diverse relationships women committed very violent acts. As a result, even in the early stages of selection of cases, the decision to only focus on women who killed friends, strangers or acquaintances meant there were some extremely violent murders committed by women that would not be included in this study.

Categorising the relationships between the victims and women who killed them was not always clear in the case records. Subsequently each case summary had to be read to be able to determine whether the victim was a stranger, friend or acquaintance of the female offender and to ensure that they were not a family member or intimate partner in

an ongoing relationship. In determining whether the cases would be included, criteria for strangers, acquaintances and friends were used to guide the decision making process. The criteria for strangers were people about whom the perpetrator had no prior knowledge, acquaintances were victims who had some functional relationship with the perpetrator but with whom the relationship was devoid of intimacy, and friendships involved personal contact between victim and offender, which was more frequent and more intense than that of acquaintances.

Defining the types of relationships required understanding of the level of intimacy involved in the relationship and whether or not the sexual intimacy, if it existed, constituted an emotional bond that could have defined their relationship as being of a domestic nature. Two cases were selected which involved friendships that included sexual behaviour. One woman provided sex to her victim in exchange for accommodation, while another woman provided sex in exchange for alcohol. These cases were included as the sexual intimacy did not mean the women were in a domestic relationship with their victims. As stated, determining the relationship required reading each case in detail to determine more clearly the relationship that existed. There were also subtle differences in what constituted a friendship as opposed to an acquaintance. However, it became clear that friendships usually involved some emotional connection that was more intense than that of an acquaintance. The nature of the relationship was also defined in the transcripts by the judges, prosecutors and defence counsel in their descriptions of each case. These judgments also helped in the decisions that were made about which cases were to be included. These definitions of friend, acquaintance and stranger were the first indicator that women would be included in the study. Although there was often a blurring as to what defined a

friendship or an acquaintance these distinctions in the end were not critical factors in the analysis as the focus became more clearly non-family.

What became central to selection was that the relationship between the women and their victims was of a non-family nature, and did not include intimate partners. Indeed, the most important criteria for exclusion were if the victim and offender were engaged in an intimate relationship or were living together in an exclusive and domestic relationship. However, this was not always easy to determine. In one case this distinction was not completely clear as the relationship had recently terminated. However, as the female offender was in a new relationship I considered that her intimate relationship with the victim had ceased and that the victim could be considered non-family. It was on this basis that this case was included.

At this early stage of investigation I was concerned that the total number of women's homicides for this time period was not consistent with other research so a further search was undertaken in the Victorian jurisdiction, using the word 'murder'. This elicited a total of 911 cases and included both male and female murderers. The data did not identify the gender of the accused, so in order to determine whether the offender was female, the entire 911 cases were reviewed. This involved reading the initial summaries of each case, with the majority being murders, to confirm if the accused was female. From this extended search, the number had increased to a total of 50 potential cases involving women who had killed non-family members.

Reviewing 911 cases was both time consuming and difficult emotionally, as it meant reading a high number of accounts of very violent crimes. In addition, I found that each case could be numbered differently on any given day, depending on what new data was

being transferred to the site. Therefore, I was unable to rely on the numbering system to identify cases already established as of interest to the study. Subsequently, it was necessary, each time the AustiLII site was searched, to always commence from the beginning of the list to ensure that potential cases were not missed. In the process of deciding which cases would be included, I listed every case that had involved a woman. These cases would then be reviewed in more detail to determine what could be defined as a possible case for selection. In many of the cases it was only possible to identify this potential through reading the full court transcripts.

At this point I decided to review the number of cases in Queensland and Tasmania as a way of comparing and informing the decision on whether to include other states in the study. In Queensland there were a total of 101 cases using the word 'homicide'. There were a total of five cases that involved women. However, because of the relationship between victim and offender, only one woman could possibly be included. She was accused of attempted murder. In Tasmania, of the cases reviewed under the category of homicide, there were a total of 39 cases. Of these cases there were no women identified as being involved in a murder. I decided to restrict the data collection to Victoria especially as it was clear by this time that there would be abundant and available sources of data.

In addition to the summaries of each case which were accessed through AustiLII, material reviewed included full transcripts of court proceedings and, where available to the courts, other documents such as psychological reports and transcripts of police interviews. I originally intended to obtain these documents from the Victorian Reporting Office. However, given the length of each case, which could include appearances not only at the Court Committal, but also the Supreme Court or County

Court, and at Appeal Court Hearings, and given the subsequent cost associated with obtaining all of the respective court transcripts, a request was made to the OPP in June 2008 to review the material from their premises. In July 2008 an undertaking was signed with the OPP, which outlined conditions under which the material could be reviewed. The process of reviewing the full court documents commenced in July 2008. The OPP gave permission for their library to be used and the environment was very conducive for study and support. The expert support provided by the librarians was of great assistance during what became a very labour intensive and emotionally challenging task.

This process involved identifying cases, then requesting them with OPP staff retrieving them from their storage facilities. The OPP at the time asked to focus on cases where the court case commenced in 2000 or later. This was because AustiLII had only been in operation since 2000 and these cases were easier to access. Initially five cases involving non-family were selected, all with court hearings commencing in 2000 or subsequent years. Once these cases had been reviewed I chose another five cases to be retrieved which had their court hearings commence in 1997 or 1998. These cases were again selected because the victims were not family members and they were close to 2000 to ensure an easier retrieval process.

The OPP advised me that I should expect that it would take a considerable time to review each case, and this advice proved correct. Each case would have between two and six archive boxes of material. This review process took a total of two years. In the second year my efforts became more focused. While it was a great financial advantage to read the cases at the OPP's premises instead of purchasing copies, one limitation was that the cases had to be reviewed within the working hours of the OPP.

As well as these ten cases read in detail from the full case documents held by the OPP, I also read the summaries of an additional four cases from AustiLLI. After reviewing these 14 cases, I decided to cease data collection as there were consistent themes emerging and I had reviewed a vast amount of material. Another reason to stop reading at the time was because of the emotional impact of this material, discussed further in the next section. These files graphically spoke of the circumstances of how each murder was executed. Much of the material was repetitive, as the nature of the court process involved both the prosecution and defence counsels processing each aspect of the murder in meticulous and repetitive fashion, to consolidate and confirm their respective arguments.

Having reviewed 14 cases I then decided to review other cases of interest through another database (Bruce) available for use through the OPP. This was a way of checking the decisions I had made about the selection of cases. This material was also in the public domain. From this exercise it was then ascertained which cases needed to be reviewed and those that were not available. For example, there was a case where the matter was still in contest and others were simply not available for review. It was important to have clarity on these matters, as it became clear that even though it would have been useful to include some cases, the reality of the court system would mean that the trials were not complete. This process of reviewing other cases of interest on the Bruce database was able to confirm the number of cases to be included through the exclusion of cases where the court hearings had not been completed. Therefore the cases included were those that had exhausted all avenues of court applications and hearings, and sentencing was determined. However, later these assumptions that a case was closed, was not absolutely correct. For example, one case included in the study was

still in a process of appeal. Knowing this meant that there were restrictions on the material that could be accessed and used.

In reviewing these cases, the decision to exclude those deemed as 'domestic' was difficult. There were a number of cases involving intimate others where women's violence was similar to the violence of the women included in this study. Reading the court summaries revealed that there were women involved in brutal murders across a broad range of relationships. I subsequently thought that it was the nature of this violence that was important to understand. The core of what I discovered was that some women commit very violent murders with intent, callousness, commitment, and lack of any genuine feelings of remorse across a range of relationships, but the focus of the study remained on non-family.

Nature of the data sources

In reviewing the court transcripts I read on average 1,000 pages for each case. The longest case comprised over 1,800 pages of transcripts for the Supreme Court Hearing, which lasted for 25 days. There were also transcripts of the Committal Hearing heard in the Magistrates' Court, which lasted for six days, and Appeal Court and High Court of Australia transcripts. The shortest case was approximately 200 pages. I reviewed this case a second time as I was concerned that I had missed some materials and the entire case had not been sighted. However, on the second review it was again found that the transcript notes were, as first reviewed, not substantive. In the final stages of writing the thesis, requests were made again to the OPP to review some of the cases to ensure thoroughness of data analysis.

With each case the process involved reading very lengthy court records from multiple court hearings. For example, if the case were contested, there would be the committal hearing at the Magistrates' Court which hears and determines cases of a more serious nature including murder, which may be heard by a judge in the County or Supreme Court (Magistrates' Court Victoria, 2013). Such contested cases would also include hearings in the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal and these transcripts would require perusal. In one case this involved the additional reading of two Appeal Court hearings, one of which was held in the High Court of Australia. In any appeal the matter would be trialed in the Supreme Court, as the Supreme Court of Victoria has two divisions, the Trial Division and the Court of Appeal. Being the highest court in Victoria, only the High Court of Australia can review its decisions (Supreme Court of Victoria, 2015).

Although it may have seemed a repetitive task, the opportunity to read the new court hearing would often give other evidence that otherwise may not have been available. In other circumstances, it was found that the longer the case was heard in various courts the information could at times be diluted by summaries. In all of the Committal Hearings there was often a range of evidence from witnesses that was not in the Supreme Court material. This is because the committal hearing is about assessing the adequacy of the evidence against the accused. The rawness of human emotion in the transcripts of a committal hearing was evident. There was also a greater depth and detail in the evidence provided in a committal hearing as the prosecution and defence had yet to develop their case and eliminate aspects of the evidence that did not fit with their respective arguments. In addition, there could be bail application hearings, police records of interviews, psychological reports and witness statements that formed part of the court records.

I found it was important to be careful at times not to review information of a graphic nature that I had already read, and was being repeated, as it was traumatising. It was also important to be very careful not to read material that was confidential to the OPP, as this would have breached the agreement to review the court records. It was critical not to do anything that would have forfeited the agreement to access the material from the OPP, to abide by the conditions of my undertaking with the Department and not to put the study in jeopardy.

In cases not contested the material available to review was less expansive. There were often limited court transcripts in which I could ascertain in detail the circumstances of the murder and motivation of the accused. Subsequently there was inconsistency in the material available in each case that would give insight into the murders. For example, in one case which involved three female offenders, there was little information on one woman as she had struck a deal to plead guilty to manslaughter if she gave evidence against her co-accused. This was problematic for my research in terms of having the same types of material to review for each woman's case.

It was not hard to imagine being present throughout all the court hearings. The often theatre-like performances of the various crown and defence barristers, interspersed by the careful questioning and summaries of the judge and the raw evidence of witnesses, gave life to these events. The cases often went for many weeks and the process between the first court hearing to sentencing could take two years. I found myself inextricably immersed in all of their stories for lengthy periods and often exposed to explicit detail of the murder investigations by the police, as these formed a critical part of both prosecution and defence presentations. While the lack of access to the women was a point of consternation, I gained a greater appreciation of the data. Although there was

limited information from the women themselves, as their voices were invariably silent during court procedures, this was in part compensated by access to a variety of other voices that gradually built a more complete picture of the murder committed.

Data analysis

Once the detailed note taking of all cases had been completed, all of the notes were further reviewed and summarised into key aspects of each murder. To the extent that the records allowed, I identified: each woman's background; the circumstances leading up to the murder; where applicable, others involved in the murder and how they shaped the course of actions; how the murder occurred; her defence arguments; the immediate aftermath the murder; how and what the women were charged with, and their responses to the murder. Each case was then summarised.

I then undertook a thematic analysis of the data, a process explained by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) as a means of 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. As they suggest, this method not only helped me organise and describe my data set in '(rich) detail', it also assisted in interpreting this material. Through the literature review a number of possible themes that could potentially give meaning to why these had women killed had been identified. These included killing that occurred:

- as a response to previous trauma including the defensive reactions to prior male violence
- in the context of social and economic impoverishment
- as a result of a woman's mental ill health
- from spontaneous events or confrontation

- where the woman offender had a history of alcohol and/or drug use
- in the commission of another crime
- as a contract, or
- as a response to 'religious callings'.

With the exception of the last category, all of the above themes were present in the data.

The following additional themes were identified:

- brutality
- lack of remorse by the women
- female offenders with histories of repeated episodes of sexual assault
- drug and alcohol use around the time of the murder, including to facilitate the murder
- homicides committed with dangerous men, and
- murders committed in the context of a criminal milieu or gang violence

These themes then formed the basis of the analysis about how and why women kill non-family, building a picture of their social circumstances, backgrounds and motivations.

Later it became apparent that dividing the group of women according to the type of murder – planned or unplanned – assisted in organising the data as these two categories typically reflected different motivations.

A colour-coded system was implemented identifying themes emerging from the data.

This raw data was collated into categories identifying their demographics, family backgrounds and histories including sexual and physical abuse, mental ill health and

alcohol and drug use. Coding for further potential themes on motivations and methods of killing were then implemented in a similar manner.

The court records provided guidance in determining key characteristics, such as mental health status or economic background. The judges' sentencing summaries typically reported on a number of aspects of the women's backgrounds including their mental health status, economic background, availability of family support and history of drug and alcohol use. So, for example, I categorised a woman as experiencing mental ill health if the court records indicated either one or more diagnoses of a psychiatric disorder. To determine if a woman was economically disadvantaged, the data was reviewed to determine the following: her employment status and employment experiences, income sources, housing stability and whether she had family support throughout her life.

The transcripts were used to provide detailed evidence of the particular themes. In addition to the court transcripts, the court decisions and sentencing summaries on AustiLII which helped to form decisions on which cases were to be reviewed, were also used.

Therapeutic support

A very important part of the methodology of this study was enlisting the support of a counsellor skilled in the areas of violence and trauma. The counsellor's specialist area was debriefing of professionals working with highly vulnerable families and children. I am acutely aware, from my own work experience as a senior social worker, of the potential of trauma stress including burnout and fatigue. I expected that I would be

vulnerable to this trauma through my exposure to the stories of murder. I therefore chose to engage a counsellor to help sort out my emotional reactions and to assist me to respond effectively. From the outset I acknowledged my emotional vulnerabilities and knew the importance of adopting a self-care regime. I continually questioned my capacity to undertake such a significant task. In the beginning I naively believed that my own life and work experiences would prepare me for whatever trauma would unfold. Unfortunately this was not the case.

Before immersing myself in the data I spent a year with the counsellor and soon came to realise that this was absolutely necessary if the research was to continue. As Baruch (2004, p. 64) notes, it is imperative in times of increased stress 'to draw on the reserves gained through an established self-care program'. Rather than feeling defeated by feelings of being overwhelmed and inadequate, it was important to cultivate a practice that monitored emotional fatigue and motivated me to continue.

My own childhood is scarred by the brutality of a sadistic and cruel sister who was diagnosed with schizophrenia later in life. My mother, who raised five children on her own, was unfortunately unaware of the long-term consequences for children living with a violent family member. As with many young children and women, I was also subjected to two very violent sexual episodes including an abduction by a stranger as a seven-year-old child. It is not possible to go through any of these experiences without being affected emotionally and they each have, in significant ways throughout my life, affected my own emotional steadiness. They also served to doubt my own capacity for violence. Throughout the counselling, it became imperative that I resolved my own inner turmoil and self-doubts. In exploring the violent behaviours of the women in this

study it became very important to liberate myself from what felt like a lifetime of fear of violence, and a fear of who I was or what I might be.

Throughout this study I have felt shackled by my past experiences, my fear of violence, a fear of not being normal and a strong desire not to abandon the knowledge I had gained about women's victim status in relation to violence. Nor has it helped to be immersed in a women's movement which, as described by Kirsta (1994, p. 5), initially refused to understand women's violence and desire for power, while covering up the extent and nature of women's abuse of their children and others intimately connected to them.

The benefits of counselling were considerable. Not only did I heal in immeasurable ways, but I was also able to delve deeply into the circumstances of the women's lives in ways that I may not have otherwise been able to. I knew as a young girl the capacity of other women for cruelty. When faced with such cruelty you can doubt yourself. Unless you have experienced terror as a child, it is difficult to comprehend the profound and enduring impact these experiences have on your own psychological and emotional development. In many ways it was difficult to immerse myself in stories that triggered memories that still trouble me.

Counselling thus became critical, as my different world experiences would often collide. Counselling helped to sift through the complex and often debilitating emotional and physical reactions I was experiencing through the reading of the court transcripts. According to Gibbs et al. (2009, p. 68), the brain's ability to process information is inhibited if it is being 'flooded with intense feelings, particularly those that arouse fear, distress and anxiety'. It is suggested that it is difficult in 'an unprocessed emotional state'

to 'reflect, learn and make thoughtful decisions' (Gibbs et al., 2009, p. 68). Because of my years of experience working with highly vulnerable children and families impacted by violence, neglect and poverty, I am acutely sensitive to the cumulative impact of constant exposure to trauma. I was subsequently very aware that I had to manage my own emotions in order to think critically. Managing my emotions did not mean that I could not respond emotionally. It simply meant I had to recognise the signs of stress and use therapy to understand my thoughts and feelings. By doing this I was then able to find an inner calm and transition to process the information cognitively.

These lessons of how to care for myself became clearer as time progressed. For example, at the beginning I had no idea that I was going to be reading about such brutal murders and had subsequently underestimated how overwhelmed I would feel. Hence, I was annoyed when I was compelled to take lengthy breaks from reading. The first episode came by surprise, as I had been reading, without hindrance, copious amounts of material and research and seemingly unaffected. Then, without warning, I was not able to read anymore. This was quite frustrating as I was still very motivated to continue. I recognised that this was part of the vulnerability of being exposed to violence. Reading exclusively about murder can 'mess with your mind'. In subtle ways their stories invaded my mental space. In the wondering of how and why these vile actions occurred I question my own fragilities. Initially I worried about what seemed to be an extensive period of time lost to what could have been directed to the collection of data. However, as I moved through this journey, I developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of the benefits of attending to my emotional steadiness. These breaks provided me with a greater capacity to process the information.

A couple of years after commencing this study I started to have panic attacks. It is difficult to say whether these could have been attributed to the impact of doing the research, as during this time I was living in a troubled relationship. However, what became clear during the counselling sessions were the motivations that drove me to undertake this study. I was drawn to understand the violence of women on a very personal level. As previously stated, in addition to my sister's violence, a stranger subjected me to abduction as a seven-year-old child. The trauma of this event has also resurfaced while attempting to do this research. Hence my journey has been fraught with sporadic and often unwanted breaks.

It was subsequently very important for me to develop coping strategies and a critical part of the process was therapeutic intervention to support me in the tasks of reading and critically reflecting on the key themes emerging from the data. However, I would often lament my inability to focus on the study. During these more difficult periods my sessions with the counsellor became frequent. I was constantly grappling with my own experiences of violence, my fear of violence and the reasons why I chose this difficult area of research. It was only after a year of counselling that I came to the conclusion that this was a critical factor for enabling the research to continue. Counselling allowed me to explore my own very personal fears, knowledge and experiences of violence. It is my view that when people work in the area of violence it can compel them to confront their own vulnerabilities; they can begin to question their own capacity for violence, and wonder whether their own previous actions were violent. It is not possible not to be affected by what you are reading. The horrible details of each murder committed waved through my senses, becoming at times immersed into my unconscious thoughts. Through my experience I realised that I was becoming paralysed emotionally, as my mind would not let me read any more detail. I learnt that I had to be aware of when it

was the right time to immerse myself again. Subsequently, counselling became a critical tool for healing my affected senses and strengthening my resolve to continue.

There were also times when I was paralysed by very aberrant thoughts. For example, during a very difficult family time, I could not bear to hear the word 'kill' and if the word entered my mind I became very unsettled. In desperation to understand my reactions to the word 'kill' my counsellor and I decided that I needed to see a psychiatrist. I subsequently met with her and my counsellor for additional support. At this time I desperately doubted my mental stability and ability to proceed with the research. Although I only met the psychiatrist once, I suggested to her that I did not think I had the courage to go on with the research. She was of great comfort and said that my courage would return. This was the one and only time I felt so desperate. Her insight into the experiences of previous trauma and how it impacted my functioning enabled me to cognitively understand my angst and in the process restored my resiliency. The contributions of counselling helped me to understand the complex ethical and psychological issues affecting my ability to do the research. It also provided a landscape of ideas with respect to understanding how the trauma, both previous and present in the lives of the women who killed, damaged their life chances and capacity for making emotionally intelligent decisions.

In addition to the lengthy breaks, I was always finding myself needing mini-breaks due to feelings of nausea. Nausea became a constant companion throughout the review of the case studies, especially when I had to re-read each story to clarify themes and data. I would find myself wanting to escape, both physically and mentally. However, I learnt to contain myself emotionally, by using deep breathing techniques and learning to self-

soothe, which is a technique used in therapy for survivors of trauma. This helped me to focus and remain engaged in my tasks.

Another way of coping with my distressed and nauseous state, when reading the horror and brutality of each murder, would be to write to myself. This was a way of escaping my despair and ensuring I remembered the exact nature of my feelings. I often felt morally obliged to remember just how vile the act of murder is. My writing and expressions of emotional distaste also helped in validating the suffering and fear each victim is highly likely to have felt. For example, at one stage of reading the detailed graphics of one case, I wrote myself the following note:

Every time I read the graphics of the murder I get overwhelmed – sometimes I do not know whether it is because I need to eat and or drink water, but I do know that I get an overwhelming feeling to run out of the place where I sit. Should I write it all down, if I do what will happen to me? I know from experience this feeling will go.

Subsequently, I often had to deal with the physical manifestation of my own emotional turmoil. I would find myself self-counselling, self-reassuring and self-nurturing. Importantly, I was always encouraging myself to keep going. Writing in these circumstances helped to remove my physical angst onto the paper, rather than have it remain in my head. It also helped me to remember that my pain, while real, was only a small measure of emotional discomfort compared to how each victim experienced their death. As I learnt more of their brutality, the more I became determined to have these stories heard.

Enlisting the support of the therapist was necessary to my emotional steadiness and the unfolding of ideas and knowledge concerning women's violence. When it came time to finish my therapy, my counsellor lamented that I had not written a journal to coincide with the therapeutic lessons learnt. However, it was my view that it was not possible to re-enter the trauma. I was often totally emotionally drained when I left her office. This in itself was another important lesson in how to deal with trauma. At some point the conversation had to end in order to recover and move forward.

In order to deal with the intellectual tasks of sifting and sorting through the accumulated knowledge and theories of women's violence – more specifically women and homicide – I had to deal with the emotional journey. This however is not a linear process of one task being achieved before the next task commences. It is an ongoing spiral of self-reflection and discovery. I was to learn, however, that once I had become unburdened by the emotional journey, I was liberated mentally to confront the often difficult and dark stories of death.

In addition to therapy, I read widely autobiographies and biographies of women who had been the victims of both male and female violence in an attempt to understand the different and troubled childhood of children who are exposed to danger. I also found myself drawn to reading profiles of mass murderers and serial killers. I pondered about what seemed to be my obsessive interest in these very dark human tragedies. Reading widely helped in the search for understanding the motivations to murder and the purpose of criminal proceedings. Through the reading of children's stories I gained a deeper understanding of how some wounded children survive abuse. I also spoke with prominent and well-known forensic psychiatrists and defence barristers to help me

understand both the criminal process and the longstanding impact of childhood sexual abuse.

Limitations of the study

There were a number of limitations to the study. These concerned the number of cases studied, self-censoring of data, the inconsistency and reliability of available data, the adversarial nature of the legal system, and the absence of women's voices.

Fourteen could be considered a small sample of female offenders. However, given that the total number of women who kill non-family in Australia annually is small (Mouzos, 2003), it is to be expected that the sample number would be low. So while there was richness in the data, and some important discoveries were made, the limited numbers mean that caution must be exercised in generalising the findings (Bryman & Burgess, 1999, p. xiv).

Due to the often brutalising and graphic detail being presented in court, it was difficult to summarise what I read. Although not present during these conversations, the immersion into their stories often made me feel as though I was there and there were times when I simply did not want to read any more. Subsequently a process of both conscious and unwitting censoring of my note-taking was undertaken. There was insufficient data in my notes on the backgrounds of men involved in each murder, in part because of a decision not to immerse myself any further into material that may be emotionally difficult to read. For example, in the first case the task of reading all the court cases of all offenders was time consuming and laborious, and difficult emotionally. This case involved one woman and two men. Although this process provided

important background data on the two men, I decided that it was important to only focus on the material involving women. In retrospect this may have not been the best decision, as it would have been helpful in making comparisons between the men and women involved in the group murders. However, I decided that this detail was not required. I learnt that self-censoring had limited my capacity to analyse the impact men had on women co-offenders.

The inconsistent detail available on the background circumstances for each woman was another limitation. This detail is mainly found in the summation provided by the judge in sentencing. It is also sometimes available in psychological reports if they were tendered to the court. Of those that were available, there were inconsistencies in how the material was used in the court trials. Therefore, it was not always possible to know more substantive information about the woman's family history and current social circumstances. If there were no psychological reports presented to the court, I was reliant on the judge's comments or other commentaries made by the respective defence counsel and prosecution. There were also occasions where particular data on the women found in OPP documents was not found in any of the court transcripts and therefore could not be used in the analysis, as agreed in the undertaking with the OPP.

The reliability and or truthfulness of the data has also been a consideration. For example, in attempting to locate women's expressions of remorse, the sentencing judgments, crown summaries and reports from psychologists were used as sources. Although it is not an uncommon practice for psychological assessments to occur some time after the homicide event, the delay may have impacted on their capacity to assess the women's level of culpability and emotional responses to the homicide. It was important to be mindful that the police and lawyers were operating within the

constraints of a legal system's operational definitions of murder and rules and procedures for conducting a criminal case. They were also operating in an adversarial and often combative arena.

The information provided on the victims and the accused to the courts was strategically positive. The prosecution were attempting to obtain a conviction and part of their responsibility is to also present the case for the victim. It was subsequently necessary to hear evidence which would paint a picture of their innocence and how their loss had impacted their families. In turn, the defence were attempting to present a positive view of the accused, and to evoke sympathy and understanding for their behaviours.

The different experiences and representations made about the women by both the prosecution and defence barristers are shaped within a criminal justice dialogue, where crime tends to be viewed as masculine in nature. Therefore the position of women is largely misunderstood and there is a lack of theoretical frameworks and language to understand the nature of women's violent offending (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Robertson-Stainsby, 2011). It was important to be mindful of these potential limitations of legal discourses available to understand women's violence. The small number of studies on females who kill outside family relationships meant that the ability to compare the results of this study with other research was limited.

In addition, women's own silence, which is their legal right, meant that the court did not have another source from which to access knowledge regarding their motivations (Breheny, 2014). This made the task of determining motives even more fraught. It was only after an in-depth reading of the transcripts that I was able to identify and make interpretations of what became layers of motives. This involved analysing the many

conversations and actions that occurred between the women and other offenders, if other offenders were involved; witnesses and potential other suspects; examination of psychological reports; and evidence of other expert witnesses, including forensic and medical professionals. However, psychological reports and other evidence that would have assisted those in the judiciary to understand the women's motivations were often withheld. It is understood that this is common practice for defence barristers who believe that such evidence may prejudice their client. Notwithstanding all of these factors and limitations, there was enough data to become sufficiently immersed in what became the 'unfolding story' of each murder to be able to identify data revealing what was believed to be the primary and other motivations.

Using only court transcripts and other reports made available to the courts meant being solely reliant on this source to inform the analysis. There was an awareness that the words and stories told in court were being shaped by both prosecution and defence counsels to affect the final judgement and reflected their versions of the homicide event and evidence. As argued by Robertson-Stainsby (2011, p. 103), who too relied on an examination of court transcripts in her research on female homicide offenders, it cannot be ignored that the words spoken and recorded in transcripts reflect significant power relationships that are present within the courtroom.

Of the detail that was available, as previously stated, there were often inconsistent and varied details on the backgrounds and circumstances of the women. On odd occasions, large numbers of pages were missing in the transcripts. Although this was not a significant issue, it was another limitation in the collection of data.

In attempting to determine the different categories of relationship between victim and offender, defining their relationship was not always easy. It is possible that these were either misinterpreted or the distinctions between a casual, close or intimate relationship misjudged. This was another limitation to the study. For example, there was one case which presented a challenge. Although the victim in this case had clearly separated from the female perpetrator, the separation was recent. However, technically their relationship had ended and the victim was considered non-family. My decision was that it would have been an oversight not to include this case, as the victim was not the partner of the female charged with his murder.

Finally, another important limitation is that the female offenders were virtually invisible, as their voices were heard only through psychological reports, if tendered to the court, and/ or records of interview with police. There was never an opportunity to question or clarify issues that may have been important to them. Worrall (1990, p. 162) argues that within the criminal justice system, some women are disqualified as legitimate speakers about their own circumstances. In her view, in the criminal justice arena, we do not hear or listen to women, but rather they become the subject of professional discourses and programs promising to either rehabilitate or minimise the consequences of their offending (Worrall, 1990, pp. 162–163). However, while it is a limitation to exclude the women's voices, it is uncertain as to whether they would have been truthful.

Ethical issues

The research received ethics approval from the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee. Due to the ethically complex nature of the topic it was very important to act with moral responsibility. Although it is usual practice in legal research to identify

cases by name, in this research de-identification was undertaken. Access to the OPP records was granted on the condition that the research would not result in the publication of any personal information of living individuals and other personal information related to them that was not already publicly available. This meant that any personal information which was found only on OPP documents was not to be used. I was advised that this would be undesirable and inappropriate in the absence of those individuals' prior written consent. Nor was it appropriate to seek their approval. Consequently, it was an expectation from the OPP that the women and other parties would be de-identified to mitigate against breaches of privacy and other legal risks.

In later correspondence with the OPP in April 2010, these undertakings were again confirmed when discussions were held around the risk of disclosure of information about victims of sexual offences. In this correspondence, the OPP (2010) advised that if I

obtained information by the reading the court transcript or any other document to which you have been permitted to view on the prosecution file which is not publicly revealed through the published judgments on Austlii, the Supreme Court library or legal research forum such as LixisNexis then you must ensure that this information does not reveal the identity of the Accused person as a victim of a sexual offence.

In this correspondence, the OPP (2010) noted that it was an offence under the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Acts 1958* 'to publish any particulars which would tend to identify a person as a victim of sexual offence'. For this reason, again to mitigate risk, the women were de-identified. All of these conditions of the undertaking with the OPP were again confirmed in May 2014 (OPP, 2014).

These matters were discussed with the Chair of the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee who agreed that the data should be de-identified, for two reasons. First, there was a very slight risk that in reading all the documents in the files, that some information used may not have been publicly available. Therefore de-identifying the data mitigated against this risk. Second, de-identifying the data mitigated against the risk of disclosure of information about victims of sexual offences. Further advice was sought from the Dean of the School of Graduate Research at RMIT University who supported the plan to de-identify the data for the reasons outlined.

Another important ethical issue is the absence of the victims' voices. They are central in all homicide events and yet their voices, that could give significant meaning to the killing, are absent. Polk (1994, p. 173) describes this problem as 'the issue of the missing voices'. As was demonstrated in the analysis of the transcripts, there was often a range of voices being heard, from which a narrative could be constructed. However, these voices were often clouded by their own private concerns for self-protection and entitlement to their own justice. The more immersed I became in the transcripts the more I understood how tragic the ending was for all of these victims. Although this study is not an investigation into the lives of the victims, it is important to convey some understanding of how their lives were ended. As argued by Daly (2008, p. 133) we must give attention to the stories of those who are hurt and harmed by the violence otherwise 'the literature will be littered with one-sided accounts of why violence was justified to protect one's reputation'. In the writing of this thesis and being witness to their dreadful deaths this has been an important ethical consideration throughout the study.

Conclusion

This study is an analysis of court transcripts of 14 murder cases concerning 18 women. This research aimed to improve understanding of women's homicidal violence and the lives that led to this violence. This research has been informed by feminism and is qualitative in its approach. The research methods entailed review and analysis of court transcripts from the Victorian Magistrates' Court, the Victorian Supreme Court, Victorian County Court and the Victorian Court of Appeal and in one case the High Court of Australia. The transcripts were read in the OPP where an undertaking stipulated conditions around the publication of any personal information that was not also available publicly.

Attention in this chapter has been drawn to the emotional struggles of working with such disturbing material, and the importance for researchers embarking on similar challenging areas of research to enlist the support of a counsellor.

Chapter Four

Introduction to the Women, their Victims and the Murders

This study entailed the analysis of 14 murders committed by 18 women in Victoria between 1997 and 2005. In this chapter the women are introduced and their key demographics and those of their victims and co-offenders are outlined. The two groups of murders – unplanned and planned – and the women and their co-offenders involved, are presented. First, a brief summary of each murder and those involved is provided.

In each case summary, there is consideration of the demographics and socio-economic backgrounds of the women, other offenders and their victims and there is a brief discussion of the murders and the criminal justice outcomes. In Chapter Five, the women's background circumstances are discussed in more detail. In Chapters Six and Seven respectively there is an examination of the key features of the unplanned and planned homicides.

Case summaries

The following are brief summaries of the 14 murders examined in this study.

Bridgit

Bridgit was aged 24 when she participated in a planned brutal abduction and murder of Tom, who had been involved in an armed robbery of her home where drugs and cash were stolen. The murder, undertaken with her partner Bob and other men (Peter, Brian and Laurie), was retribution for the earlier violent crime. Bridgit, her co-offenders and the victim were all involved in the illicit drug trade and she was a serious, long-term

user of drugs. She showed no remorse for her actions and boasted about her role in the murder. Bridgit was found guilty of manslaughter and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

Cherry

Cherry was aged 34 when she took part in the planned murder and dismemberment of her ex-partner, Garry, with her new boyfriend, Geoff. Both men and Cherry were active in the drug trade. Garry was blamed for the removal of Cherry's children, one of whom was Geoff's son. As a payback, a plan was hatched in which Garry was viciously attacked and killed with a pen pistol by Geoff. Geoff convinced a young man, James, vulnerable to his threats of violence, to accompany them to the murder and participate in the dismemberment of Garry's body. Cherry demonstrated no remorse for her actions and took pleasure in the dismemberment and mutilation of his body. She was originally charged with murder, but ultimately charged with accessory after the murder and sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

Chuntao

Chuntao was aged 80 when she fatally stabbed Liew in an unplanned attack using excessive violence. Both women were residents in an aged person's hostel. Chuntao had a history of psychiatric ill health. In the days leading up to the murder she was experiencing hallucinations and was fearful of being removed from the hostel. On the day of the murder she was also physically unwell. Although deemed mentally unwell, she was found to have acknowledgment of her actions and was found fit by a jury to stand trial. Chuntao was found guilty of murder and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

Jane

Jane was aged 50 when she killed Miriam in a planned attack. The case against Jane was circumstantial as Miriam's body was never found. Jane was obsessed with a previous lover who was in a relationship with Miriam. Jane's obsession led her to stalking her ex-lover in the hope that he would return to her. Jane's pursuit of him extended to women who associated with him. On the day of Miriam's disappearance Jane made nuisance calls to her and was seen entering her flat. It was claimed she shot Miriam with a firearm and disposed of her body. The murder was thoroughly planned and executed with Jane making significant efforts to ensure that she was not detected. She never admitted to the killing and demonstrated no empathy for her victim. She was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment.

Jin

Jin was aged 19 when she willingly hatched a plan with two brothers, Cain and Ian, to lure her friend Molly into a trap where she would be beaten. Jin's actions were central to the entrapment of Molly and she executed them with persistence and deliberation. Molly had been involved in a relationship with the older of the two brothers. Their relationship was characterised by his violent behaviour. Jin felt that Molly had offended others and that she deserved to be punished. She was callous and lacked any remorse for her actions. Jin was found guilty of manslaughter and received seven years imprisonment.

Leigh and Caty

Leigh was aged 39 and Caty 24 when they were involved in the planned brutal stabbing of Samuel. The murder was undertaken with Leigh's ex-husband Jason, as payback and revenge for the damage caused by Samuel to their cars and property. The assault was

planned and carried out in a vicious attack in which the three assailants overpowered Samuel. Money, drugs and other items were taken from the victims as compensation by all offenders. Samuel's partner was also seriously assaulted. All offenders and victims had criminal convictions and histories of drug abuse. There is no evidence of remorse by either Leigh or Caty. They were each charged with murder and received sentences of 18 years' imprisonment. For intentionally causing serious injury to Samuel's partner, Leigh received a further sentence of twelve months' imprisonment and Caty a further 18 months' imprisonment.

Merril

Merril was aged 36 when she murdered Tim in an unplanned attack. She was limited in nearly all areas of functioning, due to her physical and intellectual disabilities. For over 15 years she drank heavily and was self-medicating with temazapan, commonly used for sleep disorders. Around the time of the murder she was having sex with men in exchange for alcohol. Tim was one of these men who would exploit her for sex. On the night of the murder he was seeking sexual gratification and she did not want to participate. Because she was annoyed with him, she stabbed him, using excessive violence relentlessly over a period of time. She was devoid of any emotion or compassion. She was found guilty of murder and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment.

Mary, Jill and Trish

Mary, Trish and Jill were aged 23 when they planned and executed the entrapment and brutal drug- induced, frenzied attack against Adriana. The attack was orchestrated as payback for Adriana reneging on an agreement for shared housing and due to a suspicion that she was untrustworthy. All women were working in the sex industry and using drugs and alcohol excessively. Mary, Jill and Trish wanted to avenge the

alleged betrayals committed by Adriana. They all were extremely callous and demonstrated little remorse for their actions. Mary was charged with murder and received a sentence of 17 years. Trish received a sentence of 18 years. However, following a retrial in which she pleaded guilty to manslaughter, she was then sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Jill pleaded guilty to manslaughter and received a prison sentence of four years in exchange for her confession and testimonies against the others.

Pam

Pam was aged 42 when she fatally stabbed her friend and ex-partner Irene in an unplanned attack. Their relationship of 16 years was tempestuous and volatile, with Pam the victim of Irene's psychological abuse and domination. They had not been in an intimate relationship for eight years. On the day of the murder Irene was subjecting Pam to a verbal tirade when Pam snapped and fatally wounded Irene. Both women were heavy drinkers. Pam immediately regretted her actions and demonstrated significant remorse. She was charged with murder but found guilty of manslaughter by reason of provocation and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Prue

Prue was aged 18 when she killed Natalie in self-defence, in an unplanned attack, with a single stab wound to the chest. At the time of the murder Prue was homeless and her support worker was worried about her welfare, as she was known for resolving conflict using violence. She had a history of drug use and had developed a pattern of daily intoxication. There was a history of animosity between Natalie and Prue. On the night of the murder Natalie had assaulted and harassed Prue and had made threats that she was going to find her and attack her again. Prue was subsequently in fear of her life and convinced her friends to purchase a knife in the event that she had to defend herself.

She also approached police to take out an intervention order against Natalie. Prue demonstrated some remorse and pleaded guilty to manslaughter. She received a sentence of three years in a youth training facility.

Rachael

Rachael was aged 27 when she murdered Harry in an unplanned attack. Rachael was a homeless street prostitute with serious drug addictions. She had met Harry several weeks prior to the murder and they had an arrangement whereby he would provide her with overnight accommodation in exchange for sex. On the day of the murder she had a dispute with him over his request for sex. She subsequently strangled him and wounded him with a sharp instrument in a sustained and vicious attack. Rachael asserted that she killed him because he had raped her previously. At the time she was suffering from an amphetamine drug-induced psychosis. When in custody, Rachael also attempted to murder a fellow prisoner by means of strangulation when she was in custody. At the time of this second vicious assault she was still suffering auditory hallucinations. She was found guilty of murdering Harry and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. She also pleaded guilty to causing serious injury for the second assault and was sentenced to a further five years' imprisonment.

Roberta

Roberta was aged 20 when she abducted and murdered Julie, who was just a few days short of turning 15. She planned the abduction, murder and disposal of the victim's body in great detail. Roberta had known Julie's family and, given this relationship, Julie had no reason to suspect the motives of Roberta. Julie was killed by strangulation and Roberta kept her body in a wardrobe for two days, before she transported her to her father's farm, where she buried the body in a shallow grave. Although she was reported as showing remorse in custody, she lacked empathy for Julie in the days

leading up to the murder and throughout the abduction and murder. She also failed to provide any significant information to the police in their investigations or to the court, which would have assisted in understanding her motivations and actions. Roberta pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.

Sibel and Wendy

Sibel was aged 31 when she and Sean came under the influence of Wendy, aged 38 who procured them to murder Victor. Both Sibel and Sean had long histories of drug addiction and Sean was involved in dealing drugs, which he supplied to Wendy.

Wendy had a personal and business relationship with Victor that had recently failed, due to her alleged embezzlement. Victor was subjected to a terrible assault, which was part of a detailed plan put into effect by Wendy, in which he was struck across the head and injected with a substantial amount of heroin. Wendy later attempted to have Sibel and her partner killed. Sibel pleaded guilty to manslaughter and received a sentence of six years' imprisonment. Wendy was sentenced for the murder of Victor and received 20 years' imprisonment. For incitement to murder her co-offenders Wendy received seven years for each count. The sentences for incitement to murder were to be served concurrently with the charge of murder, but six years of the first sentence for incitement were to be served cumulatively with the sentence of murder. Although sentenced to 34 years, she effectively received a sentence of 26 years.

Stacey

Stacey was aged 19 when she was involved in the murder of Rowena during an unplanned attack. Stacey's partner Darcy and his male friend subjected Rowena to sexual assault and other physical indignities. They terrorised her with a machete and put a ligature around her neck. She was stabbed several times and suffered a terrible

ordeal before her death. Rowena was a stranger to all three offenders. On the night of the murder Stacey stole money from Rowena's bank account and purchased a knife, which was used as a weapon. For these acts she was charged with manslaughter. Her immaturity and dominance by Darcy caused her to remain inactive throughout Rowena's murder. She was sentenced to six years imprisonment for manslaughter.

Overview of demographics of the women, their victims and the crimes

Women offenders

The age of the women ranged from 18 to 80 years. Nine women, or half the sample, were under the age of 25 years.

Table 4.1: Female offenders by age groups

| Age groups (years) | Number of women offenders |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 15-19 | 3 |
| 20-24 | 6 |
| 25-29 | 1 |
| 30-34 | 2 |
| 35-39 | 3 |
| 40-44 | 1 |
| 50-54 | 1 |
| 80+ | 1 |
| Total | 18 |

Among those who were involved in unplanned murders, there was a wide range of ages from 18 to 80 years. Two of the women were teenaged. The range of ages for the planned murders was 19 to 50 years with seven of these 12 women aged under 25 years and 11 under 40 years.

Victims

Eight of the victims were women, aged between 18 and 84 years. Six were men aged 24 to 56 years. However, in the examination of one murder, another victim of violence was uncovered. Although this female did not die, it was deemed by the court to be an attempted murder.

Table 4.2: Victims by age group and gender

| Age groups (years) | Number of victims | Gender of victims |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 15-19 | 3 | females |
| 20-24 | 1 | male |
| 25-29 | 1 | female |
| 30-34 | 2 | male + female |
| 40-44 | 3 | male |
| 55-59 | 3 | male + 2 females |
| 80+ | 1 | female |
| Total | 14 | |

Understanding the relationship between victim and offender is considered of utmost importance in understanding the event of homicide (Mouzos, 2001; Polk, 1994). At the beginning of this thesis the terms 'strangers', 'acquaintances' and 'friends' were explained in an attempt to distinguish their relationships from those homicides that occur between family and intimate others. However, these characteristics of the relationship did not always provide answers to why the homicide occurred. As Polk (1994, p. 4) indicates, there are often few clues in the terminology of friend, stranger, family or acquaintance that give suggestions as to what provoked the homicide.

Despite the inherent difficult of using these definitions, they were useful for providing context to the homicide event and helping in the selection of cases to be studied. In cases of co-offenders, the victims sometimes had different relationships with the various

parties. Using these distinctions, there were a total of three victims who was a stranger to at least one of the offenders, seven victims who were deemed an acquaintance to at least one offender and four victims who were friends to at least one offender. There was one victim who was a stranger to one female offender and an acquaintance of the other female offender. Two unplanned and one planned murder involved a stranger. It is considered very rare for a woman to kill a stranger (Kirkwood, 2002; Polk, 1994). (See Table 4:4)

Of those who were acquaintances, relationships were forged out of their respective vulnerabilities. Most of these relationships were short in duration, intense and exploitative, and created in the context of drug-seeking lifestyles. The acquaintances were either used as a means to access drugs or alcohol, were working with the women in the sex industry, or, in one case, the provision of temporary accommodation.

The definition of a friend is belied by the relationships deemed as friendships by these women. In two cases 'friendship' was used to exploit and lure the victims into the trap in which they would be killed. These were most disturbing friendships and in many ways the betrayal more extreme, due to the vulnerability and trust that existed in each relationship. Both these were planned murders. Although this study is not concerned with intimate relationships, it includes two cases in which the victims had some previous intimacy with the perpetrator.

Table 4.3: Relationship between offenders and victims

| Offender | Victim | Relationship type | | |
|----------|---------|-------------------|--------------|----------|
| | | Friend | Acquaintance | Stranger |
| Mary | Adriana | √ | | |
| Jill | Adriana | √ | | |
| Trish | Adriana | √ | | |
| Bridgit | Garry | | √ | |
| Cherry | Tom | | √ | |
| Jin | Molly | √ | | |
| Prue | Natalie | | √ | |
| Chuntao | Liew | | √ | |
| Merril | Tim | | √ | |
| Wendy | Victor | | √ | |
| Sibel | Victor | | | √ |
| Roberta | Julie | √ | | |
| Stacey | Rowena | | | √ |
| Pam | Irene | √ | | |
| Rachael | Harry | | √ | |
| Jane | Miriam | | | √ |
| Leigh | Samuel | | √ | |
| Caty | Samuel | | √ | |

Data on the background circumstances and experiences of the victims was limited to descriptions of their use of alcohol and drugs and family support. Of the data available on victims, the evidence suggests that ten had histories of drug and alcohol use. The court evidence indicates that at least 12 of the 14 victims were intoxicated at the time of their deaths. This is again consistent with other studies, which found that over half of all victims of homicide are affected by either alcohol or drugs (Brookman, 2005; Chan & Payne, 2013; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann 1996; Mouzos, 2003, 2005; Polk, 1994; Vireuda & Payne, 2010).

Tim, who was killed by Merrill, habitually drank large quantities of alcohol. Irene, like Pam, her killer, was a heavy user of alcohol and would drink excessively on a daily basis. Jane's victim, Miriam, was also an alcoholic. Natalie lived a life that was not dissimilar to her victim, Prue. She was one of a number of young people living in the same geographical region who roamed the area in groups. She had a tough reputation, and was known for her violence and ability of creating around her a culture of fear. Molly had a friendship of 14 years with Jin. Molly too had an addiction to heroin. However, she had family support and was living at home at the time of her death. She had been in a relationship with one of the other co-offenders. This relationship was characterised by his violence, jealousy and possessiveness. Women who were involved in using drugs typically committed murder against others who were drug users.

In contrast, the evidence indicates that Rowena, Julie, Miriam, Liew, Molly, Adriana and Victor were living stable lives and had the experience of loving family relationships. Although Tim is described as being an 'alcoholic', the court evidence indicates that he was surrounded by good friends and family relationships. According to the court records, Rowena was studying at university and Julie was a promising young dancer, living with her stable, loving family. Victor was a businessman who was adored by his adult daughters. Miriam had loving relationships with both her daughters and extended family. Molly, although acknowledged for her drug use, had a loving family. While her circumstances involving drugs and working as a prostitute made Adriana socially and economically vulnerable, she too came from a loving family background. At the time of her death her two children were living in the care of her mother, and Adriana was working towards becoming their primary caregiver again.

The murders

In analysing the data two major patterns of homicides were identified: unplanned and planned, with scenarios of spontaneous confrontation associated with unplanned murders and those of revenge with planned murders. Of the 14 murders, six were unplanned and eight planned. There were six women involved in unplanned murders and 12 in planned murders.

Table 4.4: Planned and unplanned murders

| Women | Planned or unplanned murder |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bridgit | Planned |
| Cherry | Planned |
| Jane | Planned |
| Jin | Planned |
| Leigh and Caty | Planned |
| Mary, Jill and Trish | Planned |
| Roberta | Planned |
| Wendy and Sibel | Planned |
| Chuntao | Unplanned |
| Merril | Unplanned |
| Pam | Unplanned |
| Prue | Unplanned |
| Rachael | Unplanned |
| Stacey | Unplanned |

The women used a variety of methods to kill their victims, as indicated in Table 4.5. This included using their physical force, which is normally equated to masculine scenarios of homicide (Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). In 10 of the murders the victims were punched and kicked by the women. The women also used a range of weapons to bash their victims to death. These included baseball bats, wooden poles and other metal objects or boots, which were used to inflict further and fatal injuries. Three victims were also

subjected to being tied up and gagged. Knives were also used to stab and slash seven victims. Of those victims stabbed, there were two who died from a single stab wound, while the other victims suffered from multiple stabbing by more than one perpetrator. These stabbings also involved beatings by either feet and hands and objects used as weapons. Two murders involved the shooting of a firearm to kill the victims. Stabbing and slashing were methods used to kill seven victims. Two victims were also subjected to strangulation. In the planned assaults the women were more likely to use multiple methods and weapons to kill their victims, whereas the majority of victims in the unplanned assaults were stabbed to death. In planned assaults the death of the victim is likely to include their entrapment. These features will be discussed in further detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

Table 4.5: Methods of murder

| Method | Number |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Stabbing | 4 |
| Beating | 2 |
| Beating and stabbing | 2 |
| Strangulation | 1 |
| Strangulation and beating | 2 |
| Beating and injection | 1 |
| Gunshot | 1 |
| Gunshot and beating | 1 |

Six murders involved male co-offenders. Women acting on their own committed seven murders and one murder was a group of only women. Of these seven women who acted alone, two murders were premeditated and planned with precision. The other

five murders were executed in the context of a confrontation or conflict resolution and arose out of spontaneous events.

An important but comparable finding to other homicides involving women was that there were a total of 12 male co-offenders involved in six of the 14 murders. As stated previously, other homicide research indicates that females are likely to be accomplices with males who have been dominant in the death of the victim (Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994, p. 148). Four murders involved multiple males while the other two murders involved only one male. One group murder was executed and planned by women only. In two other murders, two women and a man were involved in the murder of another man. In one murder there were four male co-offenders, while in two murders there were two male co-offenders.

Table 4.6: Murders committed alone or in company

| Women | Alone or in company |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| Bridgit | Bob, Peter, Brian and Laurie |
| Cherry | Geoff and James |
| Jane | Alone |
| Jin | Cain and Ian |
| Leigh | Caty and Jason |
| Caty | Leigh and Jason |
| Mary | Jill and Trish |
| Jill | Mary and Trish |
| Trish | Mary and Jill |
| Roberta | Alone |
| Sibel | Wendy and Sean |
| Wendy | Sibel and Sean |
| Chuntao | Alone |
| Merril | Alone |

| | |
|---------|---------------|
| Pam | Alone |
| Prue | Alone |
| Rachael | Alone |
| Stacey | Darcy and Dan |

There is limited information on all males with none about one. Their ages ranged from 18 to 49 years. Some had histories of drug and alcohol use and were drug affected at the time of the murder. For some men the records indicate a troubled upbringing and experience of criminal conviction. The judge in sentencing Geoff stated that '[Geoff] had a most difficult upbringing... You have been a multi drug abuser, especially of heroin... You have had a number of prior convictions... they are for minor offences...' (Cherry, SCV, 1999, p. 3). Bob was also described by the judge as having 'had a most difficult childhood and upbringing. Later you became addicted to drugs, especially amphetamine and cannabis... You have 17 prior convictions for relatively minor matters' (Bob, SCV (A) 2000, p. 5). Jason too had a difficult family background and according to court evidence 'suffered sex abuse from his stepfather' and 'was placed in an orphanage when aged eight' (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A) 2002, p. 8). He too was reported as having an ongoing history of drug use and according to the judge had 'amassed a very large number of convictions' (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), p. 8). All of the men to varying degrees were involved in criminal activities which arose out of their drug-seeking lifestyles.

Criminal justice outcomes – sentences

All of the women were charged with either murder or manslaughter and received sentences ranging from three to 26 years' imprisonment. These sentences are comparable to the male co-offenders who received sentences ranging from three to 21 years (see Tables 4.7 and 4.8).

Table 4.7: Length of sentence by number of female offenders

| Length of sentence (years) | Number of female offenders |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 - 5 | 2 |
| 6 - 10 | 7 |
| 11 - 15 | 2 |
| 16 - 19 | 5 |
| 20 - 24 | 1 |
| 25 - 29 | 0 |
| 30 - 34 | 1 |

Table 4.8: Length of sentence by number of male co-offenders

| Length of sentence (years) | Number of male co-offenders |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 - 5 | 2 |
| 6 - 10 | 2 |
| 11 - 15 | 0 |
| 16 - 19 | 4 |
| 20 - 24 | 1 |
| 25 - 29 | 1 |
| 30 - 34 | 0 |

Chapter Five

Backgrounds of the Women who Killed Non-family

In the previous chapter key characteristics of the women, the crimes and their victims were outlined. In this chapter, the women's backgrounds are explored in further detail. By examining their experiences of sexual assault, mental ill health, alcohol and drug use and their economic and family background, a picture of their life circumstances can be established. Forms of disadvantage, including living on a low income, drug and alcohol use, mental ill health and experiences of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse, are identified among some of the women. However, the analysis demonstrates that others did not experience these disadvantages.

This chapter considers five aspects of the background to each woman, to the extent that it is possible given the limitations of the data, across their life. Where possible, reference is made to their childhood, adolescence and adulthood, for each of these aspects. For the purposes of this thesis, childhood refers to the period of their life when they were aged up to thirteen years, adolescence between 13 and 20 years, and adulthood, from 20 years. The first aspect of their background that is considered is their economic circumstances, including their experiences of employment, sources of income and housing; the second is their experiences of sexual assault; third, mental illness, and the fourth, drug and alcohol use. The final aspect of their background is the level of family support provided to the women. These five aspects of their background are discussed in the next five sections. Within each discussion of the background to the women, reference is made to the two groups – those who committed unplanned murders, and the others who

undertook planned murders. However, in most instances, there was no discernible difference in the backgrounds of the women in relation to the form of murder.

As outlined in Chapter Three, there are inherent limitations to the quality of the data.

There is no consistency in the presentation of information in the materials available, and not all information of interest to this research is available for each woman.

Economic circumstances

This section describes the economic circumstances of the women and their sources of income, financial support and experiences of employment and housing are specifically addressed. There is only information on the childhood economic circumstances of three of the women and they were described as having economically 'comfortable' upbringings. For example, Roberta was described by the judge as being born 'into what seems to have been a financially secure...family environment' (Roberta, SVC (A), 2000, p. 10). There is some information about all of the women as adolescents and adults. When considering the two groups of women who committed planned and unplanned murders, there is no obvious link between the economic circumstances of the women and the type of murder committed and hence the women are considered together as one group.

The women's sources of income were derived through paid employment, government pensions, family support or illegal activities including drug trafficking and prostitution. These findings coincide with that of Kirkwood (2002) who reported similar sources of income and forms of employment for women who had murdered. Eleven women had varying experiences of employment ranging from permanent to intermittent periods of legal employment. Six of these women were employed in either administrative,

hospitality or service-based jobs at the time at which their victims were killed. For example, Pam and Roberta were both employed in administration, Wendy was a bookkeeper, Jane was a house cleaner and Jin had a part-time job in her parents' restaurant. Three other women had had intermittent periods of employment, including Sibel who had worked in hospitality and with her father in a trade (Sean & Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7) and Trish who had worked selling computers (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, pp. 4-5). Rachael was for a time employed in the racing industry (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 6).

Other sources of income were earned through prostitution or drug trafficking. At the time of the murders, Rachael, Trish, Jill and Mary were earning their incomes through prostitution. Caty had a long history of working as a prostitute (Leigh and Caty, SCV (A), 2003, pp. 10-11). Court evidence suggests that both Bridgit and Cherry and their partners used drug trafficking to secure additional income.

Government pensions were identified as a source of income for two women. Chuntao was an elderly woman and would have been entitled to an aged pension, according to government guidelines (Department of Human Services, Australian Government, 2015). According to court evidence, Prue was 'in receipt of social security payments' which were associated with assistance provided by her social welfare agency (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 2). Other women may have had access to government pensions. For example, Cherry and Bridgit both had dependent children and would have been entitled to family or parenting payments (Department of Human Services, Australian Government, 2015).

Both Jin and Merrill had families who were sources of financial support. It is likely that Jin received financial assistance from her family as she worked in their restaurant. The court evidence provides detail of how Merrill's mother provided her with financial assistance, in addition to the income she was entitled to receive while on a disability pension. In the court, Merrill's mother described how Merrill had little success in both special and normal schools, but that she was able to obtain employment in sheltered workshops (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 114). Her mother also stated that she organised the house for Merrill, in terms of paying her rent and other bills. She noted that it was probably incorrect to say Merrill lived independently. It was, she said, more a case where Merrill 'preferred to have her own place' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 114). Her mother, in providing evidence, described how she had received the disability pension from the age of 15 but it was unclear in the court records whether she still received it at the time of the murder (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 155). Merrill's mother informed the court that Merrill had at one time a factory job and at the time of the murder she was employed to deliver newspapers (Merril, SCV, 1999, pp. 428-429).

Although there is little information describing their housing situations, the evidence suggests that accommodation was likely to have been unstable for twelve women. Jin, Jane, Roberta, Merrill, Wendy and Chuntao are the only women identified through the court records who appear to have been in secure accommodation. Chuntao and Merrill may have had access to government supported housing due to their respective disabilities. Bridgit and Cherry may have had access to public housing because of their dependent children. The court evidence also indicates that Pam, Rachael and Prue were vulnerable to homelessness. For example, Pam and Irene, according to a witness, had lived in shared accommodation. Their moving from one place to another was the result of Irene 'not being able to live by the rules' (Pam, MC, 2005, p. 264). Rachael did not

have stable housing and, as a way of addressing her homelessness, had sought shelter with various men. The prosecution, when explaining the circumstances of Tim's murder stated:

like some of the men who stayed [at the deceased's accommodation] he would have women come to his room from time, to time...one of the women who would...perhaps once a week...was [Rachael]...she was at the time 26 years of age and she was a street prostitute from [location]...She would also sleep overnight in the rooms of other residents of the [accommodation] from time to time... (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 155).

To some extent these findings concur with other studies that report that women who kill are vulnerable economically (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003). In this study, most were reliant on income from government pensions, family support, prostitution or drug trafficking. The evidence suggests that accommodation was unstable for twelve women with only five women likely to have been in secure accommodation. However, six women were in legal employment at the time at which the murders took place and other had had been in paid work at other times in their life. This suggests some diversity in the economic circumstances among women who kill non-family.

Experiences of sexual assault

There is evidence in the court records of six women who had experienced sexual assaults by family, partners, friends or strangers. For the 12 others, no evidence was available. This discussion focuses on two themes arranged around the time at which the sexual assault occurred. First, there is discussion on those women who were sexually

abused in their childhood and the impact this had on their life choices and experiences of further assault. The second theme is concerned with women who had their first experiences of sexual assault in adolescence and how this affected their lives. When considering the planned and unplanned murders, there is no obvious link between the women's experiences of sexual assault and the type of murder committed and the group of women are considered together. It is worth noting, though, that two unplanned murders occurred in the context of what their defence described as situations in which the women were experiencing requests for unwanted sex.

Caty, Trish and Rachael were victims of sexual assault by family members and strangers as children. Like many childhood victims of sexual assault they were vulnerable to other experiences of sexual assault as adolescents and adults (Kendall & Funk, 2003, p. 97). For these three women the court records indicate that their experiences of sexual assault unfolded into a series of other traumatic life events, including mental ill health, misuse of alcohol and drugs and entry into prostitution. This is illustrated in the case of Caty. In the sentencing of Caty, the judge described her experiences of sexual assault and her entry into prostitution:

It seems...that she was the victim of violence from her mother's second husband and there is some history of sexual abuse from two of her father's friends when she was seven or eight years old...She at the age of 13 became a prostitute. In doing so she took up the advice of her father that if she ever needed money this was a way to get it (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), 2003, p. 16).

Evidence from a psychological report provided to the court reported Trish as being sexually assaulted as a child. The court evidence describes Trish's father as molesting

her between the ages of nine and ten years. The judge reported that Trish's early life was traumatic, referring to her being raped by a 16 year old neighbour in the period following the separation of her parents when she was aged 12 years (Trish, SCV (A), 2005, p. 5). According to the court evidence, Trish lived with her father for 18 months when her parents separated due to the deteriorating relationship with her mother. Her father then introduced her to a man twice her age and then she went on to work as a prostitute to fund his heroin habit. According to the judge in sentencing, she had two terminations of pregnancy while with this man at the ages of 15 and 16 years (Trish, SCV (A), 2005, p. 6).

As a child, Rachael was sexually and physically abused by her father and by his associates. In the following excerpt the judge described these experiences of sexual abuse:

You are the eldest of five sisters. In your early years the man you believed to be your father was physically abusive to you, administering severe beatings with a belt as well as punching and kicking you. From the ages of six to nine you would receive a severe beating about every three months. It did not, however, end there. You were also sexually abused on many occasions by this man and, indeed, by his associates. This took the form of digital penetration of the vagina and the requirement to perform oral sex. After this sexual abuse you would apparently be rewarded with small change for what was regarded as your favours (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, pp. 5-6).

Like Caty, who was put into state care at 13, Rachael was also put into institutional care at age 14. According to the court evidence, Rachael was vulnerable while living in these

circumstances and, through her relationships with other young women, she became involved in prostitution at the age of 14. She worked in both brothel and street sex work at this time. She became pregnant at the age of 17 as a result of her 'escort work' (Rachael, SCV (A) 2001, p. 6).

The age of entry into prostitution by Caty, Trish and Rachael is at the lower age range when compared with international research. Perkins (1991, p. 2) in her study of 128 prostitutes found that young women from backgrounds of disadvantage or experiences of drug use and child sexual assault entered prostitution, either under the age of 16 (5.5 per cent) or between the ages of 16 and 18 (26.5 per cent). In a study undertaken on prostitution in Queensland, Woodward et al. (2004, p. 28) found that women entered sex work at varying ages in different sectors of the industry, with street workers on averaging commencing at the age of 19 years, women working in legal brothels at the average age of 25 and women working privately commencing at an average age of 27 years. In the US the number of young women entering prostitution is much higher with research indicating a conservative estimate recording the average of entry as 13 to 14 years (Farley et al., 2003, p. 35). A history of prolonged and repeated trauma and childhood sexual abuse is consistently identified as influencing the entry of young women into prostitution (Farley et al., 2003, p. 35; Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006, p. 85).

Caty, Trish and Rachael went on to experience other sexual assaults in their adolescence and young adult lives. For example, Trish was subjected to a sexual assault close to the time in which Adriana was murdered. This assault was described by the judge in sentencing:

In early [month], you were drugged while at a friend's house and you later learnt a number of men had had sex with you. In effect you had been gang raped. This unwanted and traumatic experience, which occurred close to the time of this offence, caused you great distress (Trish, SCV (A) 2005, p. 6).

Rachael was described in evidence to have been affected by her experiences of sexual abuse as a child and later years (Rachael, SCV (A) 2001, p. 8). Being homeless and a street based prostitute placed her at greater risk of assault. Research suggests that women engaged in prostitution are highly vulnerable to rape and are likely to suffer more serious injury (Anderson, 2003, pp. 77-78; Farley et al., 2003, p. 35). These ongoing experiences of rape and violent attacks are common experiences of young women coerced into prostitution (Farley et al., 2003; Perkins, 1991). Experiences of childhood sexual abuse also play a role in the symptoms of post-traumatic disorder for women who prostitute (Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006, p. 56). As discussed later, some of the women suffered high levels of trauma. The decisions of these women to enter prostitution were also located in their experiences of economic disadvantage.

Children who are victims of childhood sexual abuse are likely to develop forms of psychiatric disorders, dissociative and post-traumatic stress disorders (Colarusso, 2010; Breckenridge, Salter & Shaw, 2010, p. 13; Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006; Ryan, 1989; Sinason, 2002). Dissociation is a coping strategy for dealing with devastating painful experiences (Levenkron, 2007, p. 23; Sinason, 2002, p. 79). Experiences of abuse interrupt a victim's psychological development and their responses to stress can be permanently altered (Colarusso, 2010; Ryan, 1989; Sinason, 2002). Sinason (2002, p. 81) suggests that a victim of abuse who has no social support will not be able to adequately resolve their experience and will go on to have inhibited mental capacity. This leads to suspicion and

distrust and interpersonal chaos and confusion, particularly when they commence other intimate relationships (Sinason, 2002, p. 81). Dissociation enables psychological survival (Ross & Farley, 2003, p. 205).

According to court evidence, and as the research literature indicates, Caty, Trish and Rachael were affected emotionally by their childhood experiences of sexual assault and these experiences predisposed them to further abusive relationships. Children exposed to chronic sexual abuse can develop attitudes toward themselves and others which can be problematic. These early childhood relationships can provide models for the development of later social relationships (Colarusso, 2010, p. 10; Sinason, 2002). There is sufficient evidence in the life circumstances of Caty, Trish and Rachael to suggest they suffered such psychological confusion. Understanding this psychological confusion for victims of abuse is viewed by Motz (2001) as a credible explanation for their violence. According to Motz (2001, p. 7) it is reasonable to conceptualise the violent acts as a solution to their experiences of psychological distress (Motz, 2001, p. 7). Although Motz (2001) is considering the acts of violence women perpetrate against themselves and children, her psychological theorising gives meaning to the connections between their victimisation and offending. However, the courts, while sympathetic to these background experiences of sexual violence, did not consider them as relevant factors in assessing their culpability for their criminal actions.

According to the court evidence, Merril, Bridgit and Jin first experienced sexual assault in adolescence or adulthood. Bridgit's defence stated she had been 'greatly abused, traumatised, raped...' (Bridgit, SCV, 2000, pp. 114-115). The court records reveal that Jin developed aspects of her personality to cope with her ongoing history of sexual abuse and other trauma. Her barrister described how she was first raped when aged 14 and

was raped again at the age of 18 where 'she was tied up and anally penetrated by the person from whom she was purchasing drugs' (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 640-641). Neither of these assaults was reported to authorities and her parents were only told of Jin's first rape experience through a family friend (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 640-1, 651). According to court evidence, Jin's experiences of sexual assault catapulted into her overuse of drugs to overcome her suffering and humiliation. Her barrister argued that '...she has a tendency to childlike magical thinking and developed over the years three different aspects to her personality...' (Jin, SVC, 2001, p. 643). He explained that these different aspects of her personality had been developed as a coping mechanism and in 'response to ongoing history of trauma, bullying and insecurity, low self-esteem and loss of identity and culture' (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 643). This escape into magical thinking was an adaptation to sexual abuse similar to other behavioural disorders associated with self-blame appearing in adolescence (Levenkron, 2007, p. 27). Dissociative behaviours are reasonable expressions of a child attempting to deal with the pain, confusion and memories of their sexual assault experiences (Higgins & Swain, 2010, p. 220; Levenkron, 2007, p. 23).

Both Rachael and Merrill killed men who were accused of attempting to rape them. Each woman was described as being impatient and annoyed by the pestering of their victim for sex. It could be argued that Rachael and Merrill were highly vulnerable to further abuse and had limited coping skills. This context of their accumulated exposure to harm, including their ongoing experiences of sexual assault, provides some explanation of their disturbed thinking and their excessive use of violence. At the same time, both women were actively being strategic in their decision making to survive the psychological pressures of their life circumstances.

It is within the framework of women's violent victimisation by men that we can begin to understand their own vulnerabilities as children, adolescents and young women. There are devastating effects on the development of a child that are felt in the decades following sexual abuse, including the inability of some for abstract thought or coherent thinking, because of the experience of intrusive sexual thoughts (Colarusso, 2010, p. 70). The sexual and physical assault of a child can result in pathological adjustments that leave them vulnerable to manipulation and abuse in adult relationships (Kendall & Funk, 2003, p. 97). These difficulties of childhood trauma can potentially be connected to Rachael's experiences of drug use, her entry into prostitution and her psychological demise. The judge in sentencing describes these complex connections:

your childhood traumas of physical and sexual abuse, your life as a prostitute from a young age, accompanied as it was by assaults and drug addiction, had ultimately combined in the unleashing of extreme violence...(Rachael, SVC (A) 2001, p. 9).

It is not uncommon for children who have been victims of incest and childhood sexual assault to express their unhappiness through self-harm and suicidal behaviour (Motz, 2001, pp. 156-157). Self-mutilation is the most common psychological disorder for children who have suffered childhood sexual abuse (Levenkron, 2007, p. 31). Most of the women had experiences of self-wounding. These attacks against their own bodies are other types of dissociative behaviours aimed at numbing emotional pain (Higgins & Swain, 2010, p. 93). Other studies confirm the very high rates of trauma and violence experienced by women who prostitute, including assaults in their childhood and in adulthood (Heilemann, 2008; Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006; Farley et al., 2003). The experiences of childhood sexual abuse are also associated with the symptoms of post-

traumatic stress disorder, and the accumulative effect of repeated trauma is also linked to the severity of trauma symptoms (Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006, pp. 101-102). The earlier onset of trauma also impacts on women's vulnerability to increased revictimisation (Mayfield-Schwarz, 2006, p. 104).

For all of the women for whom we have evidence of sexual assault, the risk of further violence intensified as their life circumstances continued to produce vulnerability. Their friendships and relationships forged in the context of prostitution, drug addiction and homelessness were tenuous and placed them at risk of further abuse and assault. This is illustrated in the case of Trish who formed relationships that placed her at risk of further criminal activity. In his summary the judge stated:

You have had two long-term partners. Your links to them have affected your involvement in drug-related and other activities (Jill and Trish, SCV (A), p. 5)

In studies of young women involved in crime and gangs it has been found that there is a convergence of risk factors within a family, including family violence, sexual abuse and drug use, that heightened their risk to gang involvement and criminal offending (Daly, 1994, 2008; Miller, 2001; Simpson et al, 2008). These women identified as having experienced sexual assault in the family appear to fall into scenarios found in Daly's (1994) and Simpson et al.'s (2008) studies of young women involved in criminal offending, who leave home early due to issues of abuse and are drawn into a deviant milieu in which they etch out a living from prostitution, become affected by drug use and engage in criminal activity.

Mental ill health

There were a total of nine women in this study diagnosed with histories of psychiatric disorders. The types of mental ill health experienced by the women fell into the categories of bipolar affective disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, mood disorder, psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder. These diagnoses occurred in their childhood, adolescence or were identified as part of their assessment for court purposes. For all these women, mental ill health was not considered a relevant factor in sentencing. However, there was discussion in the court about their mental health status from which this analysis is drawn. Here, there was a notable difference in relation to mental health status between the women who committed unplanned murders and those who were part of planned attacks and, hence, the groups are discussed separately.

Planned murders

Of the 12 women involved in planned attacks, five women were diagnosed as having histories of past psychiatric disorders, one was identified as having no past history of mental ill health and, for six women, the available court documents do not reveal whether they had a history of psychiatric disorder or not. For those women in planned attacks for whom there is information about their mental health history, the court concluded that these factors were not present at the time at which they murdered.

Although mental ill health was not a factor considered relevant to their offending or sentencing, for five women involved in planned assaults, the court made reference to their past histories of psychiatric illness. This is illustrated in Jin's case. Jin, according

to a psychologist was described as suffering from an adjustment disorder with depressed mood symptomatology consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 658). In relation to her psychological state the psychologist offered the following opinion to the court:

she has developed multiple post-traumatic stress disorders over a number of years...with virtually no progress in terms of working through symptoms, with net result developed a general adjustment disorder(Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 658).

Evidence from Jin's barrister described her experiences of racist abuse in school and how this impacted significantly on her sense of self-worth, which in turn impacted her capacity to create meaningful relationships:

Because of her ethnic origins [Jin] was teased, racially abused and ostracized by her peers...As a result according to various experts, that as a result her social skills in her perceived and real isolation at school were not well developed...in addition she suffers a form of hirsutism...which has been of much embarrassment to her and an additional cause for ridicule...by peers (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 639).

According to a psychologist, her experience of hirsutism also caused her to question her own gender (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 654). The court evidence indicates that as a way of coping with her ongoing experiences of trauma, she developed three different personalities and her behaviour was viewed as childlike, which was attributed to dissociative disorders. However, the judge did not factor her mental health status in his final sentencing (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 642).

Caty suffered with depression and these experiences of mental ill health were attributed to childhood abuse. In sentencing Caty the judge referred to a psychiatrist's report to explain how she was damaged psychologically from her life experiences:

He describes her as a fairly severely psychologically-damaged individual and largely attributes that to the brutality she experiences as a child, repeated emotional rejection and her recruitment into drug abuse at a tender age. He comments that to apply a label "anti-social personality disorder", while valid, hardly captures the extent of her psychiatric disturbance. He says that she may be properly described as a substance-dependent person and one suffering from a depressive disorder (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A) 2003, p. 17).

However, a forensic psychologist was cited by the judge as stating:

it was her opinion that the escalating disturbance she was experiencing prior to the murder did not have a direct relevance to the events other than that she was in a state of some chaos and was associating with people she would not usually associate with and impulsively agreed to accompany her co-accused to the address (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A) 2003, p. 18).

Similarly, the judge discussed two different reports in the sentencing of Leigh, Caty's co-accused, to explain his determination. In the following excerpts the judge considered Leigh's psychiatric history as reported by a general practitioner:

He said that in the months leading up to the offence she was experiencing severe depression and anxiety and a specialist was varying the medication in attempt to stabilise her moods...[doctor] expressed the belief that she would not have been able to think logically at the time, with very unstable moods influenced by a Bipolar condition, medications and the difficult relationship (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), 2003, p. 9).

However, the judge's view of Leigh's mental health was also formed by the report of another doctor. In summary, this report both acknowledged her history of mental health, but also noted that she was neither suffering from delusion nor a conceptual disorder. While her mental ill health was important for understanding her history and current life circumstances, the judge determined that it could not account for Leigh's actions. In the judge's summation of this report he stated that she was:

able to present the history in a logical and coherent manner...[psychiatrist] did not identify any delusional content, nor did Leigh describe any current suicidal or self-harm ideation. Leigh, she said, was not suffering from any conceptual disorder... (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), 2003, p. 10).

In sentencing Caty and Leigh, the judge acknowledged that they had suffered 'from varying degrees and types of psychiatric illness...' (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), pp. 12-13). However, while weighing up their histories of poor mental health and confirming the histories given, the judge felt both women were mentally well enough not to reduce their culpability.

Cherry and Wendy were described as not being impaired by mental ill health at the time they murdered although the court heard that they had experienced psychiatric disorders. For example, Cherry suffered with bipolar affective disorder but when she killed Garry, she was deemed by the court as not suffering from this condition (Cherry, SCV (A) 1999, p. 5).

In Roberta's trial, the judge acknowledged the reports of a forensic psychiatrist and two forensic psychologists but, because of Roberta's unwillingness or inability to provide information, he deemed the reports to be of limited assistance (Roberta, SCV (A) 2000, p. 9). The judge did go so far as to state that she suffered 'from a deeply entrenched personality disorder which contributed to [Roberta's] conduct' (Roberta, SCV (A) 2000, p. 9). He also noted that she presented as 'a real danger to anyone who may become the unfortunate subject of [Roberta's] fixation' and for these reasons thought it 'necessary to have regard to the protection of the public as a significant sentencing consideration...' (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 9). Regardless, this disorder did not mitigate her culpability or responsibility for the actions she undertook.

Unplanned murders

Four of the six women involved in unplanned attacks had a previous diagnosis of a mental illness, with the mental health history of Stacey unknown and court records citing no information of psychiatric illness for Prue. There were two female offenders in these unplanned attacks who had been experiencing delusions and hallucinations prior to the killing of their victims. These two women – Rachael and Chuntao – were the only women in this study where there was clear evidence of how their respective mental disorders were posed in court as a potential mitigating factor in the killing of

their victims. However, while the court acknowledged their respective mental illnesses, the defence of mental impairment was not available in either case.

Pam was described by the judge in sentencing to have had a personality disorder exacerbated by her long-standing alcohol dependence (Pam, SCV (A) 2006, p. 6). He stated that 'at times you could be destabilised by significant underlying anxiety and depression and so act when stressed in an impulsive manner' (Pam, SCV (A) April 2006, p. 6). Pam was described by her defence as having been 'battered down and depressed...by deceased's behaviour and in particular by her tongue until she needed to be free of it...' (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 421). In sentencing Pam the judge referred to a psychological assessment of her:

your poor self-concept and a condition known as "learned helplessness" may have combined to preclude you from extricating yourself from people who were in a position of dominance and power over you. In the end, he says, it may be that that which led to your offending... (Pam, SVC (A), 2006, p. 7).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the concept of learned helplessness was first coined by Walker (1989) to help understand why battered women remain with their violent partners. Women who live in violent relationships often feel and experience no control in their lives. They live in constant fear of being attacked and the threat of attack and do not believe they will ever be able to leave (Brookman, 2005, p. 172). Recent research informs us that this fear is justified as women are at greater risk of being killed when they leave their violent partner (Bradfield, 2002; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). However, the term 'helplessness' depicts women's passivity and potentially negates the evidence that women's behaviour is also about their capacity for making strategic decisions

concerning their safety and the safety of their children. While the judge offered this as a possible explanation, it was also the prosecution's argument that Pam acted out of anger not loss of control (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 405).

Chuntao and Rachael, who were involved in unplanned attacks, were the only offenders who were described in court as having experienced delusions and hallucinations prior to the killing of their victims. In Chuntao's court case there were counter arguments from the prosecution and defence as to whether she was fit to stand for trial. Chuntao's defence barrister argued repeatedly that he could not obtain instructions, as she did not understand the conversations or concepts explained to her. This is evidenced in his response to the prosecution's psychiatrist's statement that Chuntao had made a remarkable recovery from her physical troubles, enough to be able to have a level of understanding of her actions:

My personal view is that [doctor] has been able to perform a miracle in being able to elicit various admissions from my client which I have not been able to during the last 20 or conferences I have had with her (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 78).

According to the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997*, if a person is unable to give instructions to their legal practitioner at some time during the trial, they will be deemed unfit to stand trial for the offence for which they were charged. However, in Chuntao's trial, the jury had found her fit to stand for trial. According to the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997* (Victorian Government, 1997, p. 14), under these circumstances, the trial would have 'resumed in accordance with usual criminal procedures'. As the jury had found her fit to stand for trial, the defence then had to proceed without being able to receive instructions and with no

capacity to use her mental impairment as a form of defence. In sentencing the judge acknowledged these factors:

you were suffering a serious mental disturbance, as the very nature of your attack upon the deceased tragically demonstrates, but not sufficient to be mentally impaired as defined by law (Chuntao, SCV (A), 2000, p. 3).

According to the defence's psychiatrist, Chuntao 'serially attracted psychiatric attention over the past five years for a range of problems...on some occasions diagnosed as suffering paranoid psychosis' (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, pp. 126-127). The psychiatrist goes on to state that at the time in which she killed Liew:

she was erratic, tending to be aggressive. She was imagining things that weren't happening, things of that nature...at least at one stage she apparently was hoarding knives and forks...to protect herself from ghosts or try to expel them from her room (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, pp. 126-127).

This evidence is supported by a psychogeriatrician who stated that in the week prior to the murder Chuntao 'was in the very early phases of deterioration into what...is known as a paranoid delusional disorder', similar to an episode she had had five years previously resulting in her being admitted to hospital (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 67). Her defence further argued that 'one week prior to incident [Chuntao] was referred to a [psychiatric unit] following her swallowing an amount of ointment known as Pharmedepa tablets...Temazepan', which was understood to be a suicide attempt. On the day of the murder the defence psychiatrist says she had been reported as being unwell and was heard talking very loudly and had 'been talking to her dead father that

very day of the murder' (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 68). Evidence tendered to the court indicated that according to her cultural background, it would have been a very frightening experience for Chuntao to see her father, as this is symbolic of death. Her mental state was also assessed not long after being placed in prison as she had attempted self-harm. This incident is described by the psychiatrist:

she was engaged in an episode of serious self-harm... she had been banging her head repeatedly against a wall, and she had been found by correctional staff to have a shoelace tied tightly around her neck ... This was someone who, within a week or so of having committed the crime, is now engaging in potentially fatal suicidal behaviour, and it was that, in fact, precipitated her referral to our care - relatively minor degree of depressive symptoms ... by the time she was transferred back to prison, she was still a manifestly unhappy and apprehensive woman but did not have evidence of continuing depression and certainly not psychosis (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 68).

Chuntao's hardship was also closely linked to the trauma experienced from living in wartime and migration and settlement issues. In evidence, a psychiatrist provided the following understanding of Chuntao's early life:

We have to bear in mind that here is a woman who was born in [country] who grew up [country], who fled communism, the communist regime in [country] and then subsequently lived in [country]. She has described various unpleasant and difficult experiences throughout that time. She came to Australia 20 years ago...Her husband died and she has no experience of the Australian legal system...(Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 127).

Chuntao was suffering strong delusional thoughts at the time in which she killed; the fact that she had recently attempted suicide and her expressions of fear and anger were all key contributing factors impacting on her fragile mental state. She was also suffering, according to her defence, with a urinary tract infection, which was preceded by a subarachnoid haemorrhage in the brain, compounding her psychological and psychiatrically fragile state.

For Rachael, the defence of mental impairment was not tested in court, despite significant discussions in evidence concerning her experiences of psychosis. The judge records in his summary that the psychiatrist providing her assessment 'did not regard [Rachael]'s psychosis as providing [Rachael] with any defence of mental impairment' (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 7). However, the following excerpt from the judge's summary attests to the court's consideration of her difficult life history, her addictions and her experience of mental health:

This is a truly tragic case. Your childhood traumas of physical and sexual abuse, your life as a prostitute from a young age accompanied as it was by assaults and drug addiction, have ultimately combined in the unleashing of extreme violence causing death in one instance and serious injury in another. In passing sentence upon you I take into account your mental state at the time of the commission of the offences, your deprived and traumatic background, and your determination to rehabilitate yourself (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 9).

In this excerpt the judge is referencing a second event in which Rachael, when imprisoned after the murder of Harry, attempted to murder another female prisoner. According to court evidence from a psychiatrist, Rachael was still 'experiencing voices

and had the sense of confusion, rage and persecution, although this was still waning' at the time of this attack (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 8). The judge stated that Rachael had knowledge that this female prisoner had 'prior convictions for the sexual abuse of minors' and subsequently became agitated and re-experienced past experiences of sexual abuse as a child and in later years (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 8). Although Rachael was described as a 'damaged' woman she was, according to the judge, not considered psychotic when she murdered (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 8).

Similar to Chuntao, Rachael's mental health was deteriorating leading up to the murder of Harry. Her diminished mental capacity was acknowledged by the judge in sentencing when he referred to her experiences of child sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation. Rachael also had a history of amphetamine and heroin use and, according to the judge, preceding the murder, Rachael had escalated her amphetamine use to two grams of 'intravenous amphetamine per day' and had commenced using another amphetamine-like drug, Ritalin, (Rachael, SCV (A) 2001, p. 7). Following this escalation of drug use she started to hear voices, which persisted into her incarceration. At the time of the killing she was said to have been suffering with an amphetamine-induced psychosis (Rachael, SCV (A) 2001, p. 6). According to a psychologist's report her experiences of sexual abuse, her intoxication with alcohol and drugs, and her experiences of persecutory feelings and increased aggression, were all factors that contributed to her rage and behaviour. This rage persisted into incarceration and she was still experiencing auditory hallucinations when she attempted to murder a female prisoner, just days into her incarceration (Rachael, SCV (A) 2001, p. 8). Despite her diagnosis of psychosis, the judge noted in summary that this did not provide her with any defence of mental impairment (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 8 of 10).

Despite mental health being an important factor for understanding Rachael and Chuntao's history and circumstances leading up to their assaults, both women were deemed by the courts as having agency, responsibility and culpability for their criminal actions. These case studies indicate a complex interplay between their difficult histories and circumstances and agency. They also provide further support to the growing body of feminist research that suggests that women's violence is more complicated than stories of reactive violence (Daly, 2008; Morrissey, 2003; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Seal, 2010). Both these women believed their victims deserved to be hurt and, although their actions were not planned, they willingly resorted to the use of physical violence to seriously hurt their victims.

Although nine of the women had been diagnosed with varying psychiatric illnesses these were not factors considered by the court as playing a major role. Only two women were considered to be suffering from hallucinations and delusions in the events leading up to the killing of their victims, and both these women were involved in unplanned murders. However, these factors were not considered relevant by the courts in their sentencing. These case studies appear to be consistent with homicide research that suggests that very few offenders kill as a result of a clinically diagnosed illness or psychiatric history (Brookman, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Wallace, 1986). There was an absence of information about mental health for eight of these women, and one was identified as having no past history of mental ill health.

The use of alcohol and drugs

The data reveals that 15 of the 18 women had histories of drug or alcohol use. Jane, Roberta and Chuntao were not identified as using alcohol or illegal substances. Drugs

and alcohol were a major feature of most of the murders, both planned and unplanned. In particular, one of the planned murders occurred in the context of criminal drug trade activities. However, as the use of drugs and alcohol permeate so strongly most of the unplanned and planned murders, they have been discussed together as one group.

The court evidence reveals that, for many, drugs and alcohol were used to cope with varying adverse life experiences. All fifteen women were identified as being poly drug users. The illegal drugs used by the women included cannabis, heroin and amphetamines including speed, ecstasy and cocaine. Alcohol and benzodiazepines were also identified as drugs used by the women. Amphetamines are commonly understood as psychostimulants, heroin is an opiate, which acts as a depressant to the nervous system, and benzodiazepines are minor tranquillisers (The Women's Hospital, 2012). This section examines the women's varying patterns and circumstances of drug and alcohol use.

The court evidence indicates that the use of drugs and alcohol was problematic for all of these fifteen women, with some women using drugs or alcohol daily. Merrill and Pam were two women whose use was considered excessive. Merrill was reported as self-medicating with large doses of Temazepam and alcohol daily. Merrill's use was so extreme that the judge ordered the prosecution to forward a letter to the then Minister of Health, reporting her excessive use and the failure of the medical practitioners to control her ability to obtain prescriptions with multiple doctors. Her mother presented evidence that, during a period when she had cleaned Merrill's flat, she found various prescriptions. Merrill was taking 'probably 40 or 50 different things and that she had discovered bottles of Normison were being supplied by different chemists and different doctors' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 431). Merrill's mother noted that she aware that Merrill's

use of alcohol was getting worse and had subsequently sought the support of Victorian Department of Human Services hoping she would receive 'some sort of counselling or just some aid to help her' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 433). Her mother stated that she was unsuccessful in obtaining the help she needed. Merrill's mother also described how Merrill's drug use affected her employment opportunities, reporting a time when her problems with drugs ultimately lost her a job she had in a factory as she had been found in a toilet 'blacked out' (Merril, SCV, 1999, pp. 428-429).

Pam was identified in court as having a long standing dependence on alcohol. The judge in sentencing described her history and use of alcohol:

You began drinking alcohol at the age of 17 years and, although you started out as a social drinker, by the age of 21 years your drinking had become far more regular and intense. You tended to drink each night after work and you were twice convicted of drink driving...During that period of heavy drinking you experienced alcoholic blackouts which have not been a feature of latter years but, right up to the time of the [deceased's] death, drinking remained a problem and you typically consumed four beers each lunch hour and between 8 and 10 cans of beer each night... (Pam, SCV (A), 2006, p. 7)

There is evidence that for some of the women, serious drug use commenced during childhood. Trish and Caty were both introduced to drugs by their parents. Caty's life, like Trish and Rachael's, was described by the judge as traumatic. The judge in sentencing describes how her early family life shaped her personality and introduction to drugs:

Her counsel described her as having a personality scarred from factors beyond her control. At eight or nine years of age she was taken into care because her parents couldn't cope with her outbursts. She was described as uncontrollable and needed special help. She grew up in a home environment where her parents set no parameters and gave no appropriate guidance. She was introduced to marijuana by her parents who were drug users. Her father, who she seems to have idolised, gave her amphetamines for her 12th birthday. She remained in care until she was about 13... (Leigh & Caty, SCV (A), 2003, p. 15).

Throughout her life she subsequently developed a heavy addiction to drugs and for a time had been reliant on heroin. At the time of the murder she was more heavily dependent on marijuana. Like Caty, Trish's father introduced her to drugs, and to unsavoury friends and activities which included the introduction to a man twice her age who forced her into prostitution at the age of 16 as a way to fund his heroin use (Trish, SCV (A) 2005, pp. 4-5). The evidence suggests that when Trish left him she formed another relationship, stopped her drug use and left the sex industry, indicating that she had periods of stability (Trish, SCV (A), 2005, p. 5). However, the judge stated that illegal drugs had been a part of Trish's life for many years and the cost to Trish at times of procuring those drugs had been high and was 'linked to partying and prostitution' (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 5). The judge in sentencing Jill reported that she also started taking drugs as a teenager, which then led to her participation in prostitution (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 4). Jill had the experience of a violent relationship, from which she turned to drug-taking and prostitution (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 4).

When faced with further life challenges, Trish and Jill would find themselves returning to drugs and then to prostitution to fund their drug activities and to cope with sex work. For example, the judge in his sentencing of both Trish and Jill described how their relationships with men affected their drug use and how their drug taking was linked to prostitution (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, pp. 4-5). In reference to Trish, the judge said that '[A]t times, the cost to you of procuring those drugs has been high' (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 5). It can be speculated that the judge is stating that Trish and Jill's experiences of violent relationships and their use of drugs made them susceptible to further violence and exploitation. According to court evidence Trish also used speed in order to work as a prostitute (Trish, SCV (A) 2005, p. 5). This use of drugs to adjust to the emotional and physical experiences of prostitution is reported in other research concerned to understand the emotional experiences of performing prostitution (Kramer, 2003).

Sibel, like Trish and Jill, used drugs to cope with adverse life circumstances. She commenced drug use at a young age and left home by the time she was 16. The judge described her trajectory into the use of hard drugs:

At about the age of 15 years you left home to live with a friend at [location], where you started living off the dole, drinking and smoking marijuana and getting into minor criminal trouble. After a couple of years you returned to [location] and started taking hard drugs - speed and heroin at about age 20 years (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7).

The judge noted that Sibel had a time of being in a stable relationship and working and during these periods she had not used drugs (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7). However,

according to the judge, when this relationship broke down she attempted suicide and 'fell in with the old crowd, going back into a full-blown addiction' (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7). It was then that she met Sean who sold her drugs and the judge described her at this period as 'existing to use drugs - scoring at every opportunity - and estranged from your family' (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7).

Other women were vulnerable to violence of men known to them and would use drugs to cope with this trauma. For example, Jin, as discussed, was raped by her drug dealer at the age of 18. According to Jin's barrister she was already affected by the rape she had experienced at the age of 14 as she commenced using marijuana at the age of 15, progressing to a daily habit from a moderate to high dose, 'seeking acceptance from the wrong crowd throughout suffering the unresolved anguish and feelings of guilt from her sexual assault' (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 640). When raped again, her barrister stated that she reported having periodically overdosed with drugs when distressed (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 641). According to her barrister, she feared rejection by her parents due to a high level of shame that is associated with rape in some cultures. However, when she did disclose to her parents, they supported her and sought help for her (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 641). Through her teenage years Jin also used amphetamines and ecstasy (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 641).

Stacey was a victim of violence from her partner, with the judge describing how her mother and her employer had seen 'time and again...bruising and damage to [Stacey] (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 6). Stacey, like Caty and Rachael, also had difficulties in her childhood which are connected to her introduction to drug use. The judge in sentencing described these experiences:

You went into foster care at the age of 14 years and at the age of 15 went on to live on the streets to live and commenced abusing alcohol and a number of illicit drugs, notably heroin (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 4)

The experiences of early life trauma were also the catalyst for Bridgit to use drugs. The judge makes this link when referring to her difficult personal history:

You have undergone some particularly traumatic and oppressive experiences and have as a consequence abused alcohol and drugs (Bridgit, SCV (A), 2000, p. 6).

Cherry's behaviour can, in part, be explained by the loss of her children into state care. According to evidence, the removal of Cherry's children was a mitigating factor that caused her some distress and during this period she was using heroin (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 4). Rachael, too, also had the experience of losing the care of her children, which may have occurred as a result of her drug use. The judge in sentencing described these experiences:

At about the age of 17, you became accidentally pregnant to a client in the course of your parlour work. Your son was subsequently looked after by the parents of your then boyfriend...Although you had ceased using drugs during the course of your pregnancy, after the birth of your first child, you became addicted to heroin...On your return to [location] when you were about 19...Once again you became pregnant and ceased to use heroin. After the birth of your daughter, you resumed your heroin use...You brought up your daughter for some three

years but subsequently she was looked after by [parents of then boyfriend]
(Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 6).

The judge in his sentencing noted that Prue was significantly affected psychologically due to her history of substance use. He described her relationship with other young people where she lived:

The life which you have led...lacked any form of intellectual, social or recreational stimulation. For recreation you turned to drugs: mainly alcohol in the form of cheap white cask wine. It seems that most of your waking hours were spent with other young people of similar disposition drinking and aimlessly moving from one site to another in [location](Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 2).

Prue's involvement with other young, disengaged people appears to have placed her at risk of physical violence and vulnerability to criminal activity. This heightened risk to assaults, violence and engagement in criminal offending has been found in other research on young women drawn into 'gang' life and street crime (Maher, 1997; Miller, 2004).

For most of the women, the court evidence records their experiences of drug dependence resulted in crime related activity. These activities served to either further fund their addictions or were part of a series of decisions arising out of their chaotic lives. For example, at the time of the murder Prue was on a community-based order as a result of an incident involving drunkenness and the theft of a motor vehicle. As stated, Pam's life was also significantly affected by her heavy drinking and she was twice convicted of drink-driving. Sibel was in minor criminal trouble, most likely associated

with her drinking and smoking of marijuana. Like the women in Kirkwood's study (2002, p. 204), their experiences of drug use brought them into violent social contexts.

According to court evidence, access to and use of drugs and alcohol were connected to the women's past and current experiences of trauma and violence, including sexual assault. For some women, adverse family circumstances or living in or leaving a violent relationship were predictors of their continued addiction to drugs. Even for those women whose relationships were not violent, the demise of the relationship would be a catalyst for their relapse into drug use. When using drugs again they were vulnerable to relationships that were violent, which would also escalate their drug use. In any adverse circumstance, the evidence suggests that women commonly returned to drug use.

However, similar to Denton (2001, p. 172) who states, in her study of women convicted of serious crimes in the drug economy, that they were not 'compliant accomplices or pliable dupes', nor were the women in this study passive victims of their circumstances. In the context of drug use Denton (2001, p. 163) argues that there is an uncritical acceptance of women as victims of their pathology, pharmacology, social structures and trauma. According to Denton (2001, p. 163) this potentially makes women drug users into an homogeneous group, negating their different life experiences and leaving minimal room for understanding and exploring their agency. While a woman's trauma is highly relevant to understanding her offending, it is equally important to consider their agency. Although the women in Denton's (2001) study were not involved in homicide, their behaviour, like that of the women in this study, challenges simplistic accounts of women's criminal activity. The use of drugs, in particular, demonstrates that the women were resourceful and willingly used strategies that were required to

accomplish their goals. Although one has to be cautious about overstating what Denton (2001, pp. 171-172) describes as the emancipation and success of women in the drug economy, what has emerged in recent research is that women were not passive or inadequate in navigating their life choices in the drug economy. Similarly, the women involved in both these unplanned and planned assaults were independently assuming these lifestyles in response to their life circumstances.

Family support

As the previous sections suggest, there was diversity in the nature of the relationships that the women had with their families. While there is limited data on childhood family relationships, it is clear that some families were supportive and others not during this early period of their life. The court records indicate that three women grew up in harmful family environments that included experiences of sexual abuse and drug use. Three women had the support of their family during childhood and adolescence and these women were reported as having been raised in stable family backgrounds. There was insufficient data on the other 12 women to judge the level of family support during childhood.

In adolescence and adulthood, there was evidence to suggest that three women had no family support and these are the same women who had harmful family experiences during childhood. There was a total of ten women who had the support of some family members at the time of the murder and during the subsequent court cases. For the other five women there is little evidence to indicate the nature of their family relationships and the level of support offered.

The three women with families who were supportive during childhood are among the ten women who had the support of some family members at the time of the murder and during the subsequent court cases. The remaining seven women of this group were described in court as having family members who were supportive and prepared to offer them assistance. It is unclear in some instances the extent to which this support was available before the murders. Among this group of ten women for whom there is information about their supportive families at the time of the murder, four women committed unplanned murders and six took part in planned murders, including the most brutal ones.

Three of the women - Jin, Wendy and Merril - came from family backgrounds that were loving and supportive. This pattern of a 'solid family background' was identified by Schwartz (2012, p. 195) in her examination of female homicide offenders. Sibel, Pam, Bridgit and Prue were also described in court evidence as having positive and supportive relationships with family members at the time of the murders. Although there is no information on Jane or Chuntao's childhood experiences, there is evidence that they had family support at the time of the murders. Similarly, while there is limited information on Roberta, there is some evidence to suggest she had at least the support of her father at the time of the murder and court case.

The experience of a loving family background is illustrated in the comments of Jin's barrister when he described her upbringing: 'up until Year 8, aged 14, she had what she describes as a perfect childhood, loving and caring parents and the love of her maternal grandmother...' (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 639). Like Jin, Wendy came from a supportive family background and was described by the judge as having lived in 'relatively comfortable

circumstances' (Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 4). Jane also lived a life that was comparatively stable in that she was living with her children and was in stable employment. According to evidence provided by her defence barrister, although Jane was divorced from her husband, they would meet for children's birthdays and other family events and that their separation had not caused difficulties between them. In addition, witnesses described Jane as being involved in committees for school, kindergarten and sporting clubs involving her children (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1792). The court heard that she was held in high regard by the children in one club and a willing volunteer in terms of raising money in another (Jane, SCV, 1999, pp. 1798-1799). One witness described Jane as 'very hospitable, very kind, generous and compassionate' (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1801).

Merril's mother, as previously described, provided considerable assistance and care to Merrill throughout her life and remained a key source of support. Prue also had a supportive relationship with her mother. The judge noted that she was 'fortunate that your parents have supported you and are continuing to do so' (Prue, SCV (A) 2002, p. 3). The judge also described how her uncle has supported her and 'continues to be of assistance' to Prue (Prue, SCV (A) 2002, p. 3). Pam was supported through the court proceedings by her brother. He gave 'evidence supportive of [Pam] as to how [Pam] used to care for him' (Pam, SCV (A), 2006, p. 8). The judge reported that Chunatao had 'two adopted daughters, who were, and are, supportive of [her]' (Chunatao, SCV (A) 2000, p. 4). It is also reasonable to think that Roberta had the support of her father as he was reported to have visited her flat and was concerned for her welfare (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 5). As previously stated Roberta also had a financially secure upbringing.

An unexpected finding of this study is that more than half of the sample of women had family support at the time of the murders and their subsequent court cases. It would appear, then, that to some extent these women were embedded in loving families.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the women's economic circumstances and their experiences of mental ill health, alcohol and drug use, sexual assault and family support. To the extent that data was available, a picture is formed of the backgrounds of the women, as summarised below.

Most of the women were in unstable or constrained economic circumstances at the time of the murders. Many of the women were reliant on income from government pensions, family support, prostitution or drug trafficking. The evidence also suggests that accommodation was likely to have been unstable for two thirds of the women. Among this group, there are patterns in their economic circumstances that are consistent with other studies which link economic disadvantage to women who kill (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1986; Mouzos, 2003). However, a third of the women were in stable employment at the time of the murders and others had had periods of employment in the past. In addition, at least four of the women had experienced financially comfortable upbringings. These contrasting findings suggest a greater level of diversity in the economic circumstances of women who kill non-family than suggested in previous research.

There is data on six women who experienced sexual assault. Three had their first experience of sexual assault in childhood and all six experienced assaults during

adolescence and/or adulthood. The sexual assaults were perpetrated by family members, partners, friends and strangers. Two of the unplanned murders were committed by women responding to what their defence argued were unwanted sexual advances. All of these women experienced long-term effects resulting in their drug and alcohol use, and mental ill health.

Half of the women had been diagnosed with a past history of psychiatric disorders. For none of the women diagnosed with a past psychiatric disorder was their mental ill health considered a relevant factor in sentencing. However among those who committed unplanned attacks, two women were identified as being psychotic at the time of the murder. These findings are consistent with other homicide research that suggests that very few offenders kill as a result of a clinically diagnosed illness or psychiatric history (Brookman, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Wallace, 1986). Most women had a history of poly drug and alcohol use, which was connected to their women's past and current experiences of trauma and violence, including sexual assault. For some women adverse family circumstances or living or leaving in a violent relationship was a predictor of their continued addiction to drugs. Even for those women whose relationships were not violent, the demise of the relationship was a catalyst for their return to drug use. When using drugs again they were vulnerable to relationships that were violent, which would also escalate their drug use and, consistent with other research, bring them into a violent social milieu (Kirkwood, 2000; Maher, 1997; Miller, 2004).

Ten women had the support of some family members. Three of these women were reported as having been raised in a stable family background. The remaining women were described in court as having family members who were supportive and prepared

to offer them assistance. This pattern of a 'solid family background' was also identified by Schwartz (2012, p. 195) in her examination of female homicide offenders.

While many of these women could be considered victims with difficult life histories of economic vulnerability, mental ill health, drug and alcohol use, and sexual violence, there is also evidence among the group there is diversity and some women were not so affected. Moreover, among the group who experienced the most disadvantage, their agency must be taken into account when explaining their violence. There is a growing body of work that is critical of locating women's criminal behaviour as symptomatic of their victimisation, as this potentially obscures a view of women's criminal agency (Denton, 2001; Daly, 2008, 2010; Maher, 1997; Miller, 2002, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Pearson, 1997, Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). As is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, these were women who were actively negotiating their life decisions. They were not passive victims of their circumstances and actively resorted to violence to resolve their conflicts.

Chapter Six

Unplanned murders

This chapter examines the six murders that were unplanned assaults committed by six women who had been charged with either murder or manslaughter of a person who was not a family member or an intimate partner. All of these murders were committed in Victoria between 1995 and 2007. The women involved in these murders were Rachael, Merrill, Pam, Chuntao, Stacey and Prue.

In analysing the data two major patterns of homicides were identified; unplanned and planned with scenarios of spontaneous confrontation associated with unplanned murders and those of revenge with planned murders. In confrontational homicide, the conflict builds up spontaneously and it is the altercation from this conflict that ultimately leads to lethal violence, whereas in revenge killings the offender is motivated because of a perceived wrongdoing and violence is planned to resolve the conflict (Brookman, 2005, p. 130; Mouzos, 2000). The women and their murders are discussed in the light of these two categories.

This chapter is concerned with those scenarios involving unplanned confrontational forms of violence. Chapter Seven will discuss in detail those murders that were planned assaults. Although confrontational violence is described as overwhelmingly masculine in homicide research, there are cases where women are the central offenders, with more recent research indicating that women will use violence to resolve conflicts and their expressions of violence are found in a wide range of circumstances (Brookman, 2005;

Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; 2005; Polk, 1994). The aim of this analysis is to build on this body of research.

Existing research indicates that the majority of homicide incidents are unplanned attacks, resulting from people responding to situations that escalate out of control in an unpremeditated manner (Brookman, 2005; Daly & Wilson, 1988; James & Carcach, 1997; Kirkwood, 2000; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). In this study, in contrast, there were fewer unplanned than planned attacks. Although this is an unexpected finding, the number of murders examined is small and caution is needed when making comparisons to other homicide studies.

The female offenders' actions discussed in this chapter, like the women whose accounts will be told in Chapter Seven, support a growing body of Australian and international research that suggests that women's homicides involve diverse relationships and circumstances and that women engage in violent acts and use different forms of violence (Fitzroy, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003; Seal, 2010).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the key motivations shaping the decisions and actions of each woman involved in the unplanned murders. The second section focuses on the key characteristics in these unplanned murders. This discussion also identifies the various types of weapons and other methods used to murder the victims, the impact of precipitating factors and the influence of drugs and alcohol. The final section focuses on the aftermath of these violent killings, as these stories of murder are incomplete without consideration of the women's conduct and emotional responses to the deaths of their victims.

Motivations in unplanned murders

According to international research, homicide cannot be treated as an homogeneous event as there are multiple influences and motivations for each offender (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2001; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Wallace, 1986). This phenomenon was found in all of these unplanned murders as the motivations of each woman were linked to multiple disagreements and bound in a series of triggers and events. A range of emotional responses, including rage, anger, frustration and a perceived need to self-protect, shaped their motives. The women also consciously used violence to solve perceived conflicts or confrontations with their victims. Their expressions of violence were driven to leverage control in their disagreements with the victims and a desire to maintain or defend their sense of honour. Five women felt victimised by the people they killed, believing they were provoked by either insults or arguments and, in two cases, the unwanted sexual advances of their victims. One murder resulted from a random killing of a female not known to the offenders, and the motivations of the female offender were linked to her being under the control and influence of her partner.

Victim-precipitation

In five of these six unplanned murders all of the victims have in varying degrees been described by the offenders as precipitating the events leading up to the murder. These women believed that the behaviour of their victims was the catalyst and motivating force for their own violent behaviour. There is only one victim, Rowena, who had no role in the evolving circumstances of her murder. Stacey, who was involved in Rowena's brutal murder, did not directly participate in her violent killing. According to court evidence Stacey was dominated by her partner of two years, Darcy, and their

relationship was characterised by his substantial violence towards her (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, pp. 5-6). The judge in sentencing Stacey said that the explanation for her presence at the murder 'was [Stacey's] immaturity and [Stacey's] dominance by [Darcy]...' (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5).

Victim-precipitation is the term commonly used to describe violent encounters where the victim is the first in an encounter to have used physical force (Brookman, 2005, p. 126; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 336). Features of victim-precipitation are also found in homicides involving confrontational violence and in intimate partner homicide, particularly female perpetrated homicide (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2000; Polk, 1994).

In summary, five of the women described being victimised by their victims. Rachael and Merrill described sexual exploitative relationships with their victims. Both men, according to Rachael and Merrill, had made persistent requests for sexual favours on the nights in which they were murdered. Although both women described earlier experiences of consensual sex, there were also occasions when the sex was unwelcome. Pam and Prue described being subjected to the violence of their victims before killing them in spontaneous attacks. Chuntao, too, believed she was being subjected to adverse comments by Liew, and was angry about Liew's perceived hostility towards her. Whilst it can be argued that the victims played a role in instigating the events leading up to the murder, the responses of each offender were out of proportion to the perceived provocation of the victims.

This pattern of victim-precipitation is demonstrated in Pam's murder of Irene. According to Pam's defence, her violence was a spontaneous response to Irene's provocation. The following excerpt from her defence's argument illustrates this view:

An accumulation of words over a range of topics and were wide-ranging and used to batter her over a number of things, used as a vehicle to hit her with until she could take no more and finally snapped suddenly, quickly and had realisation after she'd acted what she'd done (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 444).

Pam's defence was that Irene's comments were challenging her sense of self. In contrast, the prosecution contested the premise that Pam felt humiliated by Irene and, instead, argued that Irene was demonised and the murder was a result of a deteriorating relationship. This argument is evidenced in the following comment of the prosecution who stated that the confrontation was more about a:

A power struggle between these two women in reality and ultimately the accused resorted to violence to exert power over the [deceased] (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 402).

Regardless, given the level of abuse Pam experienced, her reaction to the insults is typically found in male homicides and rarely a reason for women to engage in violent activity (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Polk, 1994). According to court evidence, Prue also experienced a hostile relationship with Natalie and was responding to Natalie's verbal and physical challenges.

Prue's actions, like Pam's with Irene, demonstrated intent to take control in her conflict with Natalie. The judge in sentencing described their relationship as having 'a history of animosity' (Prue, SCV, 2002, p. 2). In their community, according to court evidence, they belonged to different groups of friends with Natalie having a reputation of being violent towards other young people to maintain her control and dominance. Prue knew from previous experiences of other friends who had fights with Natalie that she could cause serious harm. She was also aware that Natalie would seek out her victims once she had established they were in fear of her. Prue took preemptive measures in obtaining a knife and her defence argued that she did this in anticipation of an impending altercation with Natalie. According to court evidence, Prue was so fearful of Natalie and concerned for her life she went to the police to report the assault on the night of the first altercation. Although she claimed she sought an intervention order, there is no evidence that this formed part of her conversation with police. There is no record in the evidence presented to the court that police sought to undertake preventive action to assist Prue in her attempts to escape the violent threats of Natalie. The judge in his summation describes the fatal incident in which Natalie was killed by Prue:

The deceased approached the group [Prue] was in from behind. She pushed [Prue], causing [Prue] to fall to the ground. You got up and with one arm movement you struck the deceased once to the chest. At the time you did this you were holding the knife that had been stolen from the [store] (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3).

The judge in sentencing described Prue as having made serious threats to Natalie after she had punched her in the head, which included her asking for a knife from one of the people she was with (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, pp. 2-3). The judge, however, accepted these

threats were 'acts of empty bravado rather than statements of actual intention' (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3). The judge noted that the witness statements provided conflicting versions of what transpired during the conflict. The judge stated the statements were 'contradictory as to the extent of this conflict and the form it took' (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 2).

According to a psychiatric report referenced by the judge in sentencing, Prue saw herself as being victimised by Natalie preceding this incident (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 4). This conflict between Natalie and Prue has to be taken into account when trying to understand Prue's offending. However, as in Daly's (2010) study in which she found discerning the balance of victimisation and offending difficult in cases of girl on girl assaults where there was a history of conflict, the balance between Prue's offending and victim status is also difficult to determine. It is significant that the judge referred to concerns expressed by Prue's youth worker who described Prue as not having the ability to resolve conflict without resorting to violence, including violence that involved weapons. Prue appeared to lack insight into the damage that could be caused by using weapons (Prue, SCV (A), 2002, p. 2). So while Prue may have seen herself as a victim in her relationship with Natalie, there is also evidence suggesting that she had a history of resorting to violence to resolve her conflicts with others. Similar to Pam, Prue was motivated to take control in her conflict with Natalie. Her motivations could also be explained by a need to defend her sense of honour, in that she had to demonstrate that she was not going to be pushed around by Natalie. These motivations are aligned to typically masculine forms of confrontational violence (Polk, 1994).

It is unlikely that the intended outcome of these assaults undertaken by Prue and Pam were to kill their victims. This is consistent with the results of Kirkwood's (2000, p. 204)

study in which she posits the view that while women were prepared to use violence and to seriously harm their victims, the killings were unintentional. Rather she describes their behaviour as having a 'degree of recklessness'. While it is reasonable to argue that the actions of Pam and Prue were also reckless, this cannot be said of Rachael, Chuntao and Merrill. Although there was no planning involved in their confrontations, their use of violence was purposeful, and there was some consideration given by these women to using violence to resolve their conflict.

The conduct of these five victims fit within a range of least affect to most affecting. At the end of the spectrum 'of most affected' by the behaviour of their victims were Pam and Prue. Similar to domestic homicides, in which women kill an abusive partner, both these women, killed a person who had subjected them to abuse and ridicule. Both these scenarios are also typical of confrontational forms of violence where the offender becomes the target of provocative behaviour by the victim, which inflames the conflict (Brookman, 2005, p. 126; Meithe & Regoeczi, 2004, p. 220). Although these factors are important for understanding the interactions between the offenders and their victims, the picture of the event as described by the offender is a skewed account of the violent encounter and it has the potential to blame the victims for the offenders' violence.

Regaining control and defending their honour

As a way of responding to the perceived provocations by the victims, the women sought to leverage control in their disagreements by using violence. They were also motivated to rectify what they saw as displays of disrespect from their victims. In similar ways in which men are described as wanting to defend their reputation from a provocative challenge in confrontational forms of violence with other men, these women too did not

want to be seen as someone who could be pushed around and disrespected. This use of extreme violence in defence of honour is routinely associated with masculine forms of violence (Daly & Wilson, 1988, pp. 127-128; Polk, 1994, pp. 91-92). However, as in this study, Miller and Mullins (2006, p. 59) found that young women would respond to reputational challenges and that the conflicts and fights helped build a reputation that demonstrated that they were tough and not to be 'messed with'.

The case studies of Merrill and Rachael provide evidence of the motivating factor of attempting to restore honour as a result of perceived disrespectful treatment by their victims. According to court evidence, both Merrill and Rachael were frustrated by the sexual advances of their victims on the nights before they were murdered. Merrill had requested on a number of occasions that Tim leave her premises on the night of the murder. He persistently asked her to perform oral sex on him, which she refused. When Rachael murdered Harry, she, like Merrill, had a dispute with Harry over his requests for sex. There is no doubt that both men had behaved badly on the nights in which they were killed and that they were exploiting women who were extremely vulnerable. Their behaviour triggered, in both women, feelings of rage. Both Rachel and Merrill responded explosively and acted in ways that were excessively disproportionate to the misbehaviours of both men. The respective judges in each case supported this view. The judge in Merrill's case rejected her plea of provocation stating that this was 'clearly a homicide carried out with the necessary murderous intent...' (Merril, SCV (A), 2001, p. 2).

Both Merrill and Rachael were operating with agency in their social contexts, both capable of engaging with other people for resources and negotiating decisions in their daily lives. For example, according to court records Merrill was at the time employed in

a part-time job and she was considered a reliable employee. When they murdered their victims, Rachael and Merrill each made concerted efforts to ensure their victims' death. As stated, although there was no planning in these murders, there was some thought given by Rachael and Merrill to using violence. It is the brutality with which they murdered each man, to be discussed later in this chapter, which provides further evidence of their intentions to cause serious harm to their victims.

According to the evidence provided in court, Rachael and Merrill had other choices of actions that could have been pursued. The judge in Merrill's case referenced a report of a clinical psychologist whose opinion was that Merrill could have made other decisions, which she rejected:

notwithstanding your condition there were choices available to you which you rejected, even if those choices were somewhat more limited than they might have been in another person...you could have sought assistance if you considered the [deceased] attentions to have been beyond your capacity to reject (Merril, SCV (A), 2001, p. 2).

The following excerpt provided by the prosecution in his summary in Merrill's Appeal Hearing suggests that her behaviour was out of proportion to the conduct of an ordinary person: 'Not really conduct you might think that that would cause an ordinary person to lose control and kill' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 509). The prosecution uses the following excerpts in their closing address from Merrill's (M) interview to the police (P) to demonstrate her motivations and intent to harm Tim:

M: The first time I stabbed him in the stomach then a few times in the back and that didn't work so I got a razor and tried to slash him on the neck ... That wouldn't work so I got the knife again got me meat mallet and just went through the Adam's apple

P: What was Tim trying to do then?

M: Well, it took him about an hour, an hour and a half to die.

P: And what did you do during that?

M: Just kept trying to kill him.

P: And what happened after that, after he'd died, after you say he died?

M: Ah, I watched some TV, I put a doona over him and after that I went to bed and got up about 4.

P: And that's when you decided to ring the police?

M: Yes.

(Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 508).

The prosecution also demonstrated that Tim's requests for sex were not aggressive, as indicated in the following excerpt from the court transcript describing the day before the assault:

M: I met him at his drinking point and all he said, 'Do you want some sex tonight?' So I waited and waited and had a few beers and I just, I just got really uptight with him and that's when killed him, I think mainly cos I had PMT too.

P: I see but he hadn't been aggressive towards you?

- M: [She doesn't reply to that.]
- P: He wasn't aggressive to you?
- M: Nuh.
- P: Or demanding?
- M: He has been, he has been.
- P: Tonight?
- M: Nuh, Nuh

(Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 509).

There is little in this explanation of her motivation to kill Tim that can be linked to her victim status. According to the prosecution, Merrill did not kill 'in passionate fury having lost control because of being provoked' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 514). The defence argued differently stating that the ferocity of her attack was indicative of a 'sudden and temporary loss of control' in response to Tim's 'insistence and demand for sexual intercourse' (Merril, SCV, 1999, pp. 468-469). However, the prosecution argued 'nothing said by the accused at any stage amounts to an assertion that she was acting in self-defence' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 476). Although consideration was given by the judge to her 'limited capacity to reason' and her ingestion of alcohol and drugs they, too, were not reasons provided by the judge to diminish her culpability.

Although both Merrill and Rachael were operating with the constraints of their respective disadvantages, locating their behaviours as driven by self-protection limits consideration that they operated intentionally to harm their victims. As argued by Pearson (1997, p. 30), casting women as victims acting to self-protect also disallows the view that women have the capacity to be powerful and harm others. Pearson's (1997) view is consistent with a growing body of feminist research raising caution around the

victimology thesis, which is often used to explain women's criminal offending. It is argued by some feminists that focus on the victimisation paradigm can disallow seeing women as having agency (Daly, 2008, 2010; Denton, 2001; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Miller 2002, 2004; Morrissey, 2003; Pearson, 1997, Robertson-Stainsbury, 2011). In this body of work, feminists seek a more nuanced explanation of female agency, arguing that women's experiences of victimisation and criminal offending are not distinctive experiences (Daly, 2008, 2010; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Morrissey, 2003; Pearson, 1997). Merrill's pathway to offending supports this view as her past experiences of trauma and abuse cannot be directly linked to her motivations for killing Tim and cannot account for her violent offending. Although Merrill experienced disadvantages in her life, she had a stable family background and continued to be very well supported by her mother. Arguably, it was anger and frustration which were the key emotional factors fuelling the actions of Merrill and Rachel in the killing of their victims.

Acting in anger

The behaviour of Rachael, Merrill, Pam, Prue and Chuntao is also distinctly similar to what Cornell et al. (1996, p. 788) describe as reactive violence, in that all of these women engaged with their victim in a state of anger. This anger was a strong motivating factor leading to the unleashing of extreme physical violence by three of these five women. In the court, the violence was identified as exceeding the perceived threats of their victims. The case study of Chuntao illuminates this finding. Although Chuntao explained that her motive was merely to frighten Liew, her actions suggested that her motives were also fuelled by anger. This anger is evidenced by her stabbing Liew 49 times to the head and neck, with most of the wounds concentrated around the eyes. According to

the prosecution, the excessive stabbing of Liew provided evidence of Chuntao's intention to cause serious harm:

at the very least, the accused intended to blind [Liew], and intended to so by stabbing her in the eye. You would, therefore, it's submitted, be drawn to the conclusion that it was done with the intent, at the very least, to cause really serious injury. And that, the law says, is sufficient for the crime of murder (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 192).

While her actions may have been of a spontaneous nature, the level of violence was excessive. Despite her protests regarding Liew's provocation and her defence's argument that she was in poor mental health at the time, Chuntao was deemed by the courts as morally culpable for her actions. Chuntao legitimately may have felt aggrieved by Liew's behaviour. However, the courts judged Chuntao, as will be discussed later, as not responding to any immediate threat to her life when she stabbed Liew repeatedly.

Pam's actions were also, according to the prosecution, about 'anger, not loss of self-control' (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 405). The prosecution believed that the stabbing and killing of Irene had already entered Pam's mind in the months leading up to the murder. There is evidence of a conversation Pam had with Irene's son, in which she stated she was going to stab and kill Irene later that year (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 394). According to the prosecution, this phone call was evidence of her intention to seriously hurt Irene (Pam, SVC, 2006, p. 395). Pam denied that this conversation took place and the prosecution thought her response untruthful. There was further evidence from another witness, which indicated that Pam had told her that she had used a knife against Irene

in the week prior to her murder (Pam, MG, 2005, p. 64). Pam denied this incident had occurred. Despite the disagreements in court as to the intentions of Pam to seriously hurt Irene, Pam did not deny her own anger. Her defence that her threshold for frustration had seriously diminished and she acted in anger in a retaliatory capacity is evidenced in her statement to the police:

We were actually in the kitchen arguing and when deceased started arguing with me it was everything brought up...She kept calling me a low-life about my mother...Actually I might stay here till May just to make your life hell. And we just kept arguing, arguing, arguing. The next thing I had a knife in my hand and stabbed her (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 277).

When asked what she thought when she stabbed her she responded: 'I wasn't thinking' (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 278). Although Pam denied her actions were premeditated, she did acknowledge her anger and though she stated she was not thinking, she did escalate the conflict by using a knife to stab Irene. In doing so she established her control in the conflict. Under Victorian law, her actions would have to be considered as committed with intent to cause serious injury. While her experience of an abusive relationship was acknowledged in the court, the judge did not believe that she was responding to any immediate threat to her life that required a defensive action. It was the judge's view that the level of threat from Irene was not sufficient to cause Pam to lose her self-control. Although the judge understood the circumstances leading up to this event contributed to her experiencing a frenzy of passionate rage, he still found it difficult to understand how an ordinary person could react to what he considered low provocation (Pam, SCV (A), 2006, p. 5). In fact, the judge believed the murder to be a 'serious case of intentional homicide warranting substantial punishment' (Pam, SCV (A), 2006, p. 8). Pam was

eventually found not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter (Pam, SCV, 2006, p. 608).

In summary, entitlement to use violence against their victims and responses which were fuelled by anger were characteristic of five of the women who committed unplanned murders. They were unwilling to be pushed around by what they deemed to be a provocative challenge from their victim. They subsequently framed their violence as a legitimate response. Research into young women's involvement in violent crime and female gangs has also found that young women willingly resort to violence in their confrontations and respond with a sense of justification to use violence (Daly, 2008; Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller & Mullins, 2006). In similar ways these five women also acted with a sense of entitlement.

Summary of motivations

Five of the six women involved in these unplanned murders were motivated by emotional factors linked to anger, rage and frustration. All of these five women have variously described themselves as being victimised by their victims. They subsequently sought to regain control in their confrontations through the use of violence. They were also motivated to maintain or regain a sense of honour in their contest with their victims. In similar ways in which men are described as wanting to defend their reputation in confrontational forms of violence the women, too, did not want to be seen as someone who could be pushed around. The motivation of the sixth woman who was involved in an unplanned murder, was linked to her being under the control and influence of her partner.

Characteristics of the unplanned murders

This section focuses on the characteristics of the incident, including how the victim was killed, choice of weapons and number of wounds, whether the killing was done alone or with multiple perpetrators, the impact of precipitating factors and the influence of drugs and alcohol.

The use of alcohol and drugs

Five of the women involved in the unplanned attacks had histories of alcohol and drug use dependence and were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their offences. This use of alcohol and drugs is consistent with other homicide studies, including homicides involving strangers and friends (Dearden & Payne, 2009; Morgan & McAtamney, 2009; Mouzos, 2005; Parker & Auerhahn, 1999; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2009). However, Kirkwood (2000, p. 100), in her study of female perpetrated homicide, found that the majority of women who had killed either a partner or a person outside a family were not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Several examples illustrate the impact of drug and alcohol use in the murders. On the evening of Merrill's apprehension she was under the influence of alcohol and benzodiazepines. The evidence in court reports that she was addicted to these substances. The doctor who interviewed her following the murder to assess her fitness for interview with police provided the following information to the court about Merrill's use of drugs and alcohol in the 24 hours prior to the murder:

she drank three long neck bottles of beer, one bottle of Guinness, and had approximately 26 diazepam tablets and one antihistamine tablet (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 62).

It would appear that although Merrill was considered to be drug and alcohol affected, this was part of her daily pattern of drug use. Prue, too, would have been affected by alcohol as the evidence cited by the judge in sentencing records her as 'drinking a cask of Moselle with some other female companions' on the night in which she stabbed Natalie (Prue, SCV, 2002, p. 3). What is evident through this examination of the data is that all of the women were daily affected by their use of alcohol and drugs. The judge noted that Prue lacked motivation and maturity to change her circumstances and was significantly affected psychologically due to her history of drug use. According to the judge's summary, Rachael was also viewed as being intoxicated and affected by drugs, which were likely to have exaggerated her aggression (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 11). Similarly, according to court evidence, Stacey, Darcy, another man involved in the murder and Rowena and her friend had 'all consumed a large amount of alcohol' on the night in which Rowena was murdered' (Stacey, SCV (A), p. 3).

The courts acknowledged the addictions of Rachael, Pam, Prue and Merrill, and the ways these would have impacted on their life circumstances. However, notwithstanding these constraints of their respective addictions, each woman failed to make other choices and actions that would have prevented the violent assaults.

Although all of these women involved in unplanned assaults, with the exception of Chuntao, had histories of drug use dependence and were under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of their offences, their varying social circumstances and histories of victimisation cannot fully account for their violent assaults. Rather than being

passive victims of their circumstances these women were resourceful in negotiating their life circumstances and they actively resorted to violence in confrontations with their victims.

It is important to recognise, as has been argued by Denton (2001), that an uncritical acceptance of women as victims of their drug use can leave little space for women's agency and resilience. Morrissey (2003, p. 176), too, argues that the victim thesis used in feminist legal discourse potentially activates disempowering stereotypes of women. As argued by Morrissey (2003, p. 176) to do otherwise denies of women a 'full range of emotion, capacities and desires'. Maher (1997, p. 200) is critical of feminist studies that attempt to locate women's lawbreaking as symptomatic of their victimisation. Maher (1997, pp. 200-201) however makes the argument that we should also be careful not to over endow women with criminal agency either, as their 'lawbreaking' is also shaped by their resistances to survive the conditions of their existence. So in assessing these women we have to give attention to the conditions that have criminalised their behaviour, but we must also not reduce their stories of violence to a discourse of victimisation and disadvantage.

Trivial matters

As in other homicide research involving confrontational forms of violence, trivial altercations and disagreements were precipitating factors in two of these unplanned murders (Daly & Wilson, 1998, p. 125; Morgan, 2002; Mouzos, 2001, p. 5; Mouzos, 2003, p. 198; Polk, 1994). These features are also typically associated with male forms of violence (Morgan, 2002; Polk, 1994). As in male confrontations, the homicide event also involved jealousy and conflict and the event was started by a trivial argument (Polk,

1994, p. 178). For example, Pam and her friend Irene were arguing over the cleanliness of their house, when Pam snapped and fatally stabbed Irene. While this incident could be considered petty, it was not an isolated event, as according to evidence tendered to the court, Pam was stressed by the relentless verbal abuse she had been subjected to over an extended period of time. Similarly Chuntao reacted aggressively to what she saw as a thoughtless comment by Liew, yet she was affected by conflict and jealousy in her relationship with Liew. The following evidence provided by a psychiatrist reveals Chuntao's thoughts a year after the murder of her frustrations with Liew at the time in which she killed her:

That night the chef who was responsible for the catering hadn't prepared our meals. Then one in charge brought some Chinese plants, like a dried vegetable and a boiling chicken and made a soup. I was doing the laundry. Liew said, "We have some fantastic soup tonight, but you can't have any". I said, "I can have some". I sat at the doorway peeling an orange. Liew walked past, poked me in the back with her finger and said, "You shouldn't have the soup". I said "Why do you probe me, you are cruel all the time." I rose up and said, "You are always so cruel, I don't want to compete with you, I am poor, not as rich as you", she tried to push me back. I said "Why are you so cruel? Don't be so cruel". I had problems with arthritis. She pushed me back, and I dropped (the psychiatrist says that she repeated this several times)...I rose again. The orange dropped. Then we fought against each other. She pushed me, and I pushed her back. She kept shouting at me. I was in pain. I rose up. We fought against each other and rolled into a bundle. We kept fighting. I was holding the knife. We dropped. I rose up. She didn't. She lay down. I said "Why don't you rise up?"

and then I walked into the kitchen. The staff took me back to the scene and soon after the police arrived (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 109).

While the escalation of pent-up feelings and disintegration in their respective relationships was a key motivating factor for Pam and Chuntao to kill, the preceding event in both homicides could be deemed as trivial. While it is important to understand the social context of these homicides, as it was the deteriorating relationships between the women that were the cause of the violence, it was the trivial incident that provoked these women to react impulsively. However, these trivial incidents only provide part of the explanation for their violent assaults. They were each motivated by other emotional factors, including anger and frustration with their victim. More attention to their own criminal agency suggests that the intent of their violence was to leverage control in their conflict with their victim. Their violence, similar to what is understood as masculine confrontational encounters, was characterised by a series of complex factors, which included conflict in their relationships.

Acting alone or in the company of others

In these six unplanned murders, five were committed by women acting on their own. Stacey was the only offender who was part of an unplanned assault on a woman who was a stranger to all three offenders. These findings are inconsistent with other homicide research as other studies indicate that women are deemed more likely to kill with another offender (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2008; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). Mouzos (2003, p. 190), too, found that while women could kill on their own, they were more likely to kill in concert with another offender when they killed either a female or male not related to her. Kirkwood's (2000, pp. 173-174) findings also do not

support these results as she found that no woman acted on her own in the killing of a person not well known to her. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, there are seven out of the eight planned murders in which women kill with other co-offenders.

Methods of murder

In the six unplanned attacks, all six victims were stabbed with a knife or other cutting weapon. Two victims died from a single stab wound while two victims were stabbed multiple times. One of these victims was stabbed with the same knife while the other victim was stabbed and cut with three different weapons. In addition to the use of knives, three victims were killed by the use of a variety of methods. Knives were the major weapon used in four murders. This use of knives by women who kill is consistent with other research internationally (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2005; Polk, 1994).

Prue and Pam were both involved in unplanned attacks where the victim died from a single stab wound. Merrill and Chuntao stabbed their victims multiple times. Chuntao stabbed Liew 74 times in an uncontrolled attack with one weapon. Merrill stabbed and slashed Tim relentlessly over a long period of time using a knife and a mallet. Evidence from her defence described the number of stab wounds and nature of the attack: 'There are some 36 stab wounds which suggest some frenzy or ferocity of attack' (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 467). The judge also described Rowena as having been stabbed by Stacey's partner Darcy, 'numerous times most grievously...there were more than 30 injuries...' (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 3). Rowena was also terrorised by a machete and had a ligature placed around her neck (Stacey, SCV (A), p. 3).

Court evidence records that Rachael used multiple methods to kill Harry. This included the use of physical force to subdue and overpower him, a sharp object and strangulation. Drugs were also involved in this assault. In describing Harry's murder, the prosecution explains how Harry attempted initially to subdue Rachael, but instead she spiked his drink:

The deceased had attempted to spike her drink so he could get on to her, but she had tricked him and spiked his drinking instead...[she then]...bashed him, kicked him, when he is in a drunken and drugged state and somehow she has caused those lacerations to the forehead, perhaps with the glass, the broken glass or the broken plate...and then she has choked him with his own dressing-gown cord and then she has left the room (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 162).

Fundamental to this homicide is that Rachael pursued the use of multiple methods in her dispute with Harry. This use of multiple weapons provides evidence of Rachael's intent to seriously hurt her victim. Rachael and Merrill are the only two women in unplanned assaults that used multiple weapons. The use of multiple of weapons is more likely to be used in planned assaults and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven. Like the other women in the planned assaults who used multiple methods to kill, this constituted an excessive use of violence. While their background experiences may have disadvantaged them, and in part this can explain some of their frustrations, these characterisations are inadequate alone for explaining their violence.

The evidence surrounding women's use and selection of weapons suggests their violence is a product of their own criminal agency. These findings are consistent with the studies of Miller and Decker (2001), Miller (2004), Miller and Mullins (2008) and

Daly (2010) who found that young women involved in criminal activity are prepared to engage in physical attacks, with some young women being prepared to use knives to stab their victims. Women's violence, as argued by Kruttschnitt and Carbon-Lopez (2006, p. 345) expresses itself in a wide range of circumstances and is not limited to 'victimisation and bad domestic relationships'. Although the cases discussed in this thesis are few to make firm conclusions, they build on agentic narratives of women's violence.

Brutality

Brutality is a feature of four of the unplanned murders. In these cases, the victims died a violent death with the court evidence clearly suggesting that the women offenders intended to cause serious hurt and injury. This use of violence by women to cause serious injury is also reported in research into young women involved in gang violence (Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller, 2004). Stories of women serial and multiple killers and women killing in rare and unusual circumstances, also chronicle the use of extreme levels of violence (Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Seal, 2010).

The use of extreme violence was evidenced in the murders involving Rachael, Chuntao and Merrill. Each of their victims died a violent death resulting from multiple wounds. Rachael, Chuntao and Merrill made deliberate and intentional decisions to harm their victims. This intention to harm is recounted by Merrill when she describes to the police that when she was cutting Tim he begged her to stop, but she ignored his pleas and instead sought to find another weapon so she could cut deeper into his chest. The

prosecution used the following excerpts of her interview with police (P) to describe the seriousness of Merrill's (M) actions:

M: Well I didn't use the knife, I used the, I used the razor after that, because...I couldn't get his neck and his heart because he was crouching (Merril, SCV, April 1999, p. 511).

The interview went on:

P: What was the last thing you actually did to Tim?

M: Got me kitchen knife. I got, I got him in the neck and got me, me meat masher and just banged on to the handle. I stuck him in the throat, he was, I know he was dying but he was dying a slow death so I got him right in the - I got him right in the - there, the back over there, [and she was pointing to the back of her neck according to the questioner] I stabbed him, I knew where to stab him but the knife was bit blunt so I got the mallet and banged on the thing until I heard a crunch

P: If it took some time to make sure he was dead

M: Yeah

(Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 512).

When asked if he said anything while this was going on Merrill responded:

He didn't say much...All I can remember is he, when I was using the razor blade, he just said ah, stop doing that, about two or three times and then he went into

unconsciousness, you know, in and out of unconsciousness (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 512).

The prosecution, in his closing in her appeal hearing, described how Merrill was in control of her actions:

The whole killing terrible killing of this unfortunate man, by this damaged accused speaks of control, not of loss of control. Right down to the decision at the end of having to finish him off (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 496).

Rachael also killed Harry using excessive violence, which was described by her own defence as 'wholly disproportionate' to the situation she found herself in (Rachael, VSC, 2001, p. 5). The prosecution provides the following reconstruction of the event which describes the different methods used by Rachael to kill Harry and his attempts to defend himself:

there is blood found on the deceased's hands, there is blood all over his face, he has a laceration here...he has the broken nose, he has evidently at some stage put his hands to his face to get the blood you can see on his hands. She has choked him, as I say, using the dressing-gown cord. At some point she has tied his shoelaces together. Whether as part of a game that has got out of hand or whether to further incapacitate the deceased, it is one of those things we may not ever find out (Rachael, SCV, 2001, pp. 162-163).

The prosecution continued:

that...is a footprint (looking at photographs). And it is a footprint placed there by the deceased with her boot and she has put her boot there against the side of the couch to get leverage as she is pulling on the cord around the deceased's neck and that is why she threw her boots away (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 163).

To reinforce this argument the prosecution then discussed evidence from a witness from the prison in which Rachael was incarcerated. According to the prosecution this witness had told her that after she had put the belt around his neck, Rachael then:

started to choke the deceased but he woke up and cried out "you are choking me" and she said that the accused then got a bag with plates and cups in it and started smashing it into his face and kicked him in the face (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 164).

According to the prosecution, Rachael stated at the end of the record of interview to police that 'she hadn't meant to kill him, but he deserved what he got' (Rachael, SCV, 2001, p. 167). In prison, Rachael attacked a second victim. The judge stated that this victim 'did nothing to provoke your violence save that she bore the stigma of the offences of which she had been convicted' (Rachael, SCV (A), 2001, p. 5). In this attack, Rachael poured boiling water over her victim, then grabbed her hair, pushed her to the ground, kicked her to the head and body numerous times, several times bashed her head into the concrete floor and strangled her with a cord causing her to choke (Rachael, SCV, 2001, pp. 5-6). This second assault reinforces Rachael's capability of using

excessive violence. In both attacks she has intended serious harm to her victims, which is evidenced by her use of multiple methods.

Although Rachael and Merril had been victims of violence in their early childhood and adolescence and Chuntao experienced marginalisation in her early life, these experiences alone cannot account for the brutality of their violent offending. Their violent responses were also out of proportion to the perceived insults and/or challenges of their victims. Framing the agency of these women as self-protective behaviours is not helpful in explaining their intentions of bringing harm to their victims. As argued by Pearson (1997, p. 30) casting women as victims acting to self-protect disallows the view that women have the capacity to be powerful and harming of others.

Rowena's murder was also brutal. Like all the other murders involving men discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, the level of violence escalated when men were involved. In sentencing, Darcy, Stacey's partner, the judge described how Rowena was murdered:

You and your male companion subjected her to sexual interference against her will and numerous physical indignities... You sought to terrorise the victim by the production of a machete which you had at the flat. You placed a ligature around her neck. Ultimately you stabbed her numerous times most grievously. The pathologist's report of Dr [...] shows that there were more than 30 injuries to the victim, including, sadly, numerous defence injuries when she sought to protect herself from your terrible attack. Numerous incised injuries were to her neck and chest, involving vital structures including major blood vessels, her throat and her lungs. There was also extensive bruising to her body. It was

indeed a terrible ordeal which she suffered before her death, and it was at your hands, Mr [Darcy] that she died (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999 p. 2).

In the judge's sentencing, he described Darcy as a violent person:

The voluminous material in this case, Mr [Darcy] demonstrates that at the time of this offence and for years you had been a man of violence...At the time of this offence you were suffering no psychiatric illness proved before me; you were not psychotic; but you were clearly psychologically disturbed. The continuous theme, unfortunately, was that you had been a person of violence (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 2).

Although Stacey did not commit any acts of violence toward Rowena, under the directions of Darcy she had undertaken actions which contributed to the death of Rowena. In his sentencing of Stacey the judge described her actions:

In your presence your co-accused commenced to abuse and mistreat Rowena, initially in order to extract money from her for you and [Darcy] further to indulge yourselves. He directed you to obtain the machete, which was in the house; you could not find it. He then directed you to steal the money from your victim's bank account, which you did...and to purchase a knife, which you did...Thereafter, you were present when the terrible indignities and suffering were inflicted upon the innocent [Rowena] by your partner, [Darcy] (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, p. 6).

Despite Stacey not directly being involved in the murder she was responsible for both her actions and inactions that had a role in the death of Rowena. The judge described her moral guilt as significant:

You have a significant degree of moral guilt for what occurred, [Stacey], because you could have helped the victim and you did not. You could have reported the offence when you left the premises and you did not. You could have purchased heroin with the money but you did not; you purchased a knife and returned (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999 p. 5).

However, the judge also believed that Stacey was herself subjected to Darcy's violence and his dominance over her influenced her judgment to do as he told her. According to the judge's summation she was unable to respond to the enormity of what was occurring and was operating in exceptional circumstances. In his summation he recorded Stacey's (S) comments to questions by police (P), outlined below made at the conclusion of her homicide interview:

P: what made you stay in the lounge room?

S I couldn't move. I couldn't move. I thought that if I left him and tried to run that he would get me too

P: Right?

S: And I just didn't. I was so scared, I was so shocked, I didn't know what to do. You don't understand that's the most full on thing that's ever happened to me before

P: Well, when he was stabbing her he was on the floor, is that correct?

S: Yeah

P: And what do you say about not being able to get of the room then?

S: I just didn't know what to do. I couldn't move. I couldn't under...I couldn't fully comprehend what was happening. Everything - nothing seemed real, you know. I - I didn't - I never for a minute thought anything like that would ever happen in front of me in my life, you know. Nothing can make you what to do, like

(Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, pp. 5-6).

In four of these unplanned murders the victims died a violent death with three of the female offenders using excessive violence to kill their victims. This use of extreme violence is typically found in male-to-male encounters of violence and in domestic homicides involving women as victims (Brown et al., 1999, p. 161; Polk, 1994, pp. 91-92). This type of violence is also found in rare and unusual forms of female homicide, including serial and multiple homicides (Davis, 2001; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Seal, 2010).

Summary of key characteristics

This study has identified a number of characteristics in each unplanned homicide. While each homicide is unique and comprised the impact of multiple factors there are also similar features. In summary, five women killed on their own, with only one woman involved in a murder involving two male offenders. Two victims died from a single stab wound, one victim died from multiple stab wounds and three victims were killed using multiple methods. In five of these cases, the women intended to seriously harm their victims, even if the killings were not intentional. Trivial altercations and disagreements were precipitating factors in two of these unplanned murders. Brutality

was a key characteristic in four of these unplanned murders with four victims dying a violent death. One of these victims was killed by the partner of the female offender. Five women were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their offences.

Aftermath of the unplanned murders

In the aftermath of the homicide the women displayed a range of behaviours and emotional responses that provide some insight into their attitudes to the victims and the crimes they committed. Of the six women involved in unplanned murders, only two women showed genuine remorse for their actions. The other four women demonstrated no respect to their victim's bodies, failed to seek assistance for the victim and attempted to remove all evidence of their involvement in these violent killings. In most homicide studies the aftermath of a homicide incident is limited to discussion around legal outcomes and bereavement support for those affected by the loss of their loved one. Subsequently there is little research to compare to these findings. However, in the determination of sentences the treatment of the body after death can aggravate sentencing outcomes (Ross, 2009, p. 924). Therefore the court takes these matters seriously.

In this study, a key finding is that four women in the unplanned homicides left the scene of the crime immediately without assisting the victim, with five women not seeking assistance for the victim in a timely manner and four women not reporting the crime. Rachael exemplifies this behavior. She made no attempt to call anyone for assistance and before she left the scene of the crime she purposefully tied her victim's shoelaces together to restrict his movements. She also attempted to remove evidence of her

involvement by throwing her shoes into the sea. A witness described Rachael as going into a shop and 'just looking across the road to the [murder site]...' (Rachael, MC, 2000, p. 101). Later she returned to the scene of the murder and again failed to seek assistance for her victim. Rachael may have been overwhelmed by her circumstances and did not want police to know about the victim, as this action would have implicated her in his murder. These are plausible explanations for her behaviour. However, there is no evidence in the court transcripts suggesting her concern for the victim.

In the aftermath of her crime Rachael's evidence was not considered reliable. She provided at least three different versions of the event to police, explaining why and how the murder took place. In the following excerpt the prosecution describes her record of interview with police as unreliable:

it's total worthlessness as far as the exculpatory account...you couldn't rely on it from the accused's point of view...because she changes her story in the record of interview at various time you might think as it suits her (Rachael, SCV, 2001, pp. 308-309).

Although Rachael was living a difficult life as a homeless street prostitute and was afflicted by psychosis, she understood the seriousness of her actions and tried to remove potential incriminating evidence. The prosecution in reconstructing the events described what she did following the murder:

What we do know is that when [Rachael] left the room that night on [date], she took with her two cups from the room and she took them down to the [location] pier and she threw them in, presumably because those cups might have traces of

Oxazepam and that she had used to drug the [deceased] and then she has thrown her two boots into the water also. Why has she done that? (Rachael, SCV, 2001, pp. 162-163).

Chuntao also left the scene of the crime. Although she ultimately reported the murder, she did not do so in a timely manner. Following the murder of Liew, Chuntao went back to her room and called for assistance to go to the dining room. She was also seen, according to the court records, going to the laundry with clothes and leaving without the clothes. She said to a nurse 'I have killed the woman in Room [number], and I have killed someone and it is real' (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 99). She then left the hostel and walked some distance trying to hail a taxi. It was on her return to the hostel that Chuntao informed a worker again that she had killed Liew (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 180). Later the vegetable knife that she stabbed Liew with was found in a drain in the courtyard of the hostel. Although Chuntao was mentally unwell during this period, she was, according to the judge, aware of her fatal actions. Rather than seeking help for Liew she had the presence of mind to go on with her normal daily activities, so as to not draw attention to her actions. The judge in his sentencing of Chuntao described her actions following the fatal stabbing of Liew:

you showed a knowledge of your fatal actions by the later actions ... namely the washing of clothes, the placing of the knife and leaving the premises
(Chuntao, SCV (A), 2000, p. 2).

Merril too was completely indifferent to the suffering of Tim. Her actions were purposeful, fuelled by a sense of justification and feelings of being entitled to act on her anger. Although she called the police, she did so only because she wanted his body to

be removed from her premises. This was not an action to seek assistance for Tim. Her level of callousness is demonstrated by her sustained attack and by the fact that she decided to have a sleep following his brutal murder. The prosecutor in his closing address referred to part of a conversation that Merrill (M) had with a detective (P) while she was being transported to the Homicide Squad Office following her arrest:

M: the kitchen is where we had the fight then I blacked, I blacked, he must have been, must have walked into the hallway and then come back and then I woke up because that's when I killed him.

P: When you say you woke up and then killed him, how long after that did you then contact the police?

M: it was around 1 o'clock, I decided to have a sleep.

(Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 513).

She then described in the interview how she went to bed and got up at around 4 o'clock (Merril, SCV, 1999, p. 513). In another exchange with this same detective she also talks about 'finishing him off' after she had blacked out:

He kept going on and on about it and then I cracked and blacked out and then the last time I saw him he was on the couch with these huge stab wounds all around his back and so I had to finish him off, so I got my knife and just went like that (Merril, SCV (A), 1999, p. 3).

The senior police officer arriving on the scene described her as being calm. Despite her intellectual disability and the impact of temazepam and alcohol on her cognitive functioning, it is difficult to reconcile her indifference to his suffering and her ability to

sleep in the chaos she had created. It is likely that he was also not dead until she decided to 'finish him off' after her sleep. The judge in his summary believed that there was no evidence of behaviour from Tim that indicated she had to act in self-defence (Merril, SCV (A), 1999, p. 4).

With the exception of Rachael, all of these women, despite leaving the scenes of the crime and failing to report the crime in a timely manner, did eventually cooperate with the police in their investigations. Despite their admissions, and for some their protests that they did not intend to do wrong to their victim, these demonstrations of remorse were not always believed in court. For example, Chuntao on several occasions stated that she never intended to hurt Liew. However, it was suggested that her protests were more about not wanting to bear the burden of shame for her actions. In court evidence, a psychiatrist explained that if Chuntao were found to have killed because of a mental illness it would have constituted 'a particularly profound sense of or source...of shame and stigma' in her culture (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 91). The psychiatrist gave these reasons to explain her fear about what might happen as a 'result of these proceedings' and her difficulties in attending to court matters (Chuntao, SCV, 2000, p. 98). These expressions of not intending to hurt Liew were statements made in preparation for her court hearings. They are also possibly statements by a woman who did not want to bear the burden of shame, rather than genuine feelings of remorse for Liew.

Pam and Stacey appear to have had genuine expressions of remorse. Of these women it is only Pam who confessed remorse immediately after the murder of Irene. She also provided warmth and comfort to Irene while she was dying, as she was grief stricken and horrified by her actions. Pam instructed her counsel to undertake a cross examination of her in a way that caused Irene's family minimal stress. Given the long-

term nature of their friendship, which included a few years in which they were intimate partners, it is not surprising that Pam was emotionally repentant. In sentencing Pam the judge believed her remorse was sincere.

Unlike many cases in which remorse is feigned or only partial, it seems to me that you would do anything you could to turn back the clock and thus bring back the deceased for her own sake rather than yours (Pam, SCV (A), 2006, p. 8).

Although Stacey failed to seek help for Rowena when she had the opportunity, it is likely that her inactions were, according to the judge, shaped by the fact that she was 'frozen' by the enormity of the situation. She was frightened by what she was witnessing and was threatened by her partner that the same fate would happen to her. The judge in his sentencing believed her responses to the police were genuine and honest and he was convinced of her remorse (Stacey, SCV (A), 1999, pp. 6-7).

The offender's conduct and emotional responses to the deaths of their victims provides further understanding of their offending. Four of these women left the scene of the crime and five women failed to seek immediate assistance for their victims. Only two women demonstrated what the courts deemed as remorse for their actions.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined six scenarios of unplanned homicides committed by six women who had been charged with either murder or manslaughter of a person who was not a family member or an intimate partner. All of these murders involved confrontational forms of violence. Although confrontational violence is described as

overwhelmingly masculine in homicide research, there is research where women are the central offenders (Brookman, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; 2005; Polk, 1994). The findings of this chapter support this view that women will use violence to resolve conflicts and their expressions of violence are found in a range of circumstances.

The findings suggested that a range of emotional responses including rage, anger and frustration and a perceived need to self-protect shaped their motivations. Five women felt victimised by their victims, believing they were provoked by either insults or arguments and in two cases the sexual advances of their victims. Their expressions of violence were also driven to leverage control in their disagreements with the victims and a desire to maintain or defend their sense of honour. The women too did not want to be seen as someone who could be disrespected. One murder resulted from a random killing of a female not known to the offenders and the motivations of the female offender were linked to the offender being under the control and influence of her partner.

Five women were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their offences. Five victims were stabbed to death with two victims killed from a single stab wound and three victims killed as a result of multiple stabbings. One victim died from strangulation, physical force and injuries sustained from a sharp object with another victim stabbed and subjected to a ligature placed around her neck and being terrorised by a machete. This use of physical and assaultive force is also evidenced in research on young women involved in gangs and criminal activity (Daly, 2010; Miller & Decker, 2001, Miller, 2004; Miller & Mullins, 2008). In four of the unplanned murders the victims died a violent death, with one of these victims being killed violently by the

partner of the female offender. Five of this unplanned assaults involved women acting on their own; only one offender was involved with another. This finding is not consistent with other homicide research, as women are typically found to kill in concert with others (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2008; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994).

Of the six women, only two women demonstrated what the courts deemed as remorse for their actions. The other four women demonstrated no respect to their victim's bodies, failed to seek assistance for the victim and attempted to remove all evidence of their involvement in these violent killings.

These murders reveal varying degrees of convergence between their offending and victimisation. However, their psychological and physical responses in their conflicts with their victims, according to court evidence, are to a greater extent linked to their criminal agency and linked to their desire to be in control or to regain control over their circumstances. Each of these women rejected other actions and decisions that may have avoided the death of their victims. These cases studies provide further support to the growing body of feminist research that suggests that women's violence is more complicated than stories of reactive violence (Daly, 2008; Morrissey, 2003; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997; Seal, 2010).

Chapter Seven

Planned murders

This chapter examines eight homicides that occurred as a result of planned assaults by twelve women who were charged with either murder or manslaughter of a person who was not a family member or an intimate partner. The women involved in these murders were Roberta, Bridgit, Cherry, Trish, Jill, Mary, Jane, Caty, Leigh, Sibel and Wendy.

In the area of criminal research planned homicides are often classified as instrumental, as they are crimes that are goal-directed and purposeful (Brookman, 2005, pp. 47-48; Cornell et al., 1996; Mouzos, 2005; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004, pp. 101-102). The findings of this study indicate that over half of the assaults were planned. Although this is an unexpected finding, it reflects the results of Mann's (1996, p. 175) study of female homicide across six United States cities.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the motivations of the women. The findings indicate that the principle motivation was revenge, with the women's actions also fuelled by feelings of anger and jealousy. The act of violence was a way of exerting and regaining control in their conflict with their victims. This use of violence is viewed as distinctly masculine (Brookman, 2005; Morgan, 2002; Polk, 1994).

The second section details the characteristics of these planned homicides. In six of these scenarios women killed with others, with five murders committed with men and one murder involving three women co-offenders. There were two scenarios where women killed on their own. Detail is provided on the use of drugs and alcohol by the offenders

and victims, the role of men in the murders, methods used to kill the victims and the types of weapons used by the offenders. There is also a focus on the use of excessive violence and brutality as all of the victims died a violent death. The final section focuses on the aftermath of these murders, as it provides important information that can be used to better understand the motivations and intentions of the offender.

Motivations in planned murders

As with all homicide encounters, these planned assaults were fuelled by a range of emotional and psychological responses to events that led the offenders to kill (Kirkwood, 2002; Mann, 1996; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). The primary motives were revenge, anger and jealousy. In summary, eight women were predominately motivated by revenge and anger for a perceived wrongdoing, two women were motivated by jealousy, one woman was motivated by jealousy and revenge, and one women was motivated by financial greed. Their acts of violence, which are typically equated to masculine scenarios of homicide were, in most instances, a way of exerting and regaining control in conflict with their victims (Brookman, 2005; Morgan, 2002; Polk, 1994). The discussion commences with an exploration of the one scenario in which the offender was driven to kill for financial gain.

Economic motivation

With the exception of Wendy, there is no evidence that the women were motivated to kill for financial benefit. This is in contrast to other studies suggesting that women's violence is driven by economic need, strain and frustration, deprivation and marginalisation (Carlen et al. 1985; Edwards, 1986; Kruttschnitt, 2009; Mann, 1986;

Steffensmeier, 2009; Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008). However, one could argue that their experiences of gender inequality and structural disadvantages, including poverty and unemployment, would have played a role in limiting the women's life opportunities, resources and power, and impacted on their decision to kill. Similar to Kirkwood's (2000, p. 258) study, in which she concluded that women's killing stems from their experiences of disadvantage, including poverty, the economic and social difficulties encountered by each woman could have impacted the social circumstances in which they found themselves. However, as we shall see, these social circumstances were not key motivating factors.

Wendy was motivated by financial benefit in her decision to kill Victor. According to court evidence, Victor had become aware that Wendy was embezzling money and had 'misused her position as the operator of some of his financial accounts and to this end he had taken the necessary steps to cancel her authority to operate the accounts' (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 2). In order to secure the support of her two co-offenders, Wendy told Sean and Sibel another version of events, as described by the judge:

She told you he was not paying his bills, was trying to take away a house belonging to her and was forcing her to have sexual intercourse involving bondage (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 2).

Her motivation for financial gain was also confirmed following his death, when she tried to persuade Victor's 'debtors to pay their debts to her rather than to his estate' (Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 3). Following the murder of Victor, Wendy went on to incite the murders of Sibel and Sean, when she asked an undercover policeman to murder them. The judge in sentencing Wendy stated:

you sought to incite the murders of [Sibel] and [Sean]. You told the undercover police officer whom you hired to do the job that you wanted them dead because they had gone beyond their instructions and killed [Victor], the man you loved. You also told him that you were afraid they would talk (Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 3).

The judge described the steps she undertook to hire the undercover police officer and her approach:

It is true that the undercover police officer made the initial contact with you, and not you with him. At the same time, it was you and not he who first raised the subject of the prospective killings of [Sibel] and [Sean]. Having raised it, you thereafter continued to give him instructions to put your scheme into effect, and made several down payments as an earnest of your intentions. Yours was not a casual or diffident approach to the prospective deaths of two people. It was purposeful and continued over an extended period...(Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 5).

These behaviours suggest that she was prepared not only to exploit her co-offenders for financial gain, but to kill them to secure her freedom from prosecution for Victor's murder. All of these actions were primarily motivated by her self-interest and desire to seek financial benefit. It is important to note that Wendy did not suffer the economic and social disadvantages that many of the other female offenders did in this study. Therefore, her motivations for financial benefit were not about releasing her from the burdens of poverty, but rather were fuelled by financial greed. Chan (2001, pp. 76-77)

argues that women who act out of self-interest, either for financial or sexual reasons highlight a 'darker side of women's offending'.

Although Wendy planned the murder of Victor with the intentions of financial benefit, these were not Sibel's motivations. According to court evidence summarised by the judge in sentencing Sibel and Sean, they had both come under the influence of Wendy:

In the months leading up to the death of [Victor], Wendy formed a relationship with both of you. You were drug addicts, and you [Sean] supported these habits by dealing in drugs. You supplied amphetamines and heroin to Wendy, and you both became friendly with her. She showered you both with money for drugs and gifts. She took you to the casino and gave you gambling money. Wendy operated a [shop] in [location] from which many of the gifts came. By reason of Wendy's generosity, you both fell under her strong influence (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 2).

Sibel and Sean subsequently agreed to help Wendy 'tie up the deceased, force him to sign the house back over to her and show him what being tied up was really like' (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, pp. 2-3). Wendy deceived both Sibel and Sean and they agreed to provide the assistance requested of them. This included the purchase of speed and heroin, some of which was intended for Victor. They also willingly participated in the assault. It could be argued that Sean and Sibel were motivated to avenge the purported financial losses and sexual abuse by Victor experienced by Wendy. The judge described Sean and Sibel as being under Wendy's influence, and each attacked Victor because of what they deemed to be his inappropriate behaviour towards Wendy. Similar to the study of Daly (2008) who found young women would justify their violence in assaults with other

women, both Wendy and Sibel operated within a context in which they felt the victim deserved to be hurt.

Revenge and anger

The principal motivating factors for nine women involved in six of the planned murders was revenge and anger. They all sought to avenge a perceived wrongdoing by the victim. Revenge killings are usually considered to be masculine forms of homicide (Brookman, 2005, p. 140; Polk, 1994). However, Robertson-Stainsbury (2011, p. 210) also found evidence of women admitting to killing for revenge in her study of women's homicide in Australia.

In summary, Bridgit participated in the brutal abduction and murder of Tom, who had been involved in an armed robbery of her home where drugs and cash were stolen. Cherry participated in the murder of Garry whom she blamed for the removal of her children by state child protection services. Jin perceived that Molly had offended her and others and thought she deserved to be hurt. Caty and Leigh murdered Jason as payback and revenge for damage caused to their cars and property. Jill, Trish and Mary abducted and killed Adriana as she was perceived to have failed to fulfill a commitment to a housing agreement and was not considered trustworthy. Sibel sought revenge for her friend, Wendy, whom she believed had been deceived by her partner and sexually assaulted by him.

In contrast to the unplanned attacks in which the women felt victimised by confrontation by their victims, in these planned scenarios the offenders were more likely to enact revenge for the behaviours of their victims. Unlike those scenarios of

confrontational homicide, where the women responded spontaneously with reactive violence, the women in these planned attacks used their anger to plan their revenge against their victims. However, in similar ways to how the women felt in the unplanned murders, these women motivated by revenge also sought to leverage control in their disagreements with their victim and did not want to be seen as someone who could be pushed around.

In five of these homicides motivated by revenge, both the offenders and victims were involved in criminal activities that formed a framework for the settlement of their disputes. These patterns of violence involving people enmeshed in criminal activity are typically masculine in execution (Brookman, 2005; Polk, 1994). Polk (1994, p. 118) argues that violence is often the only recourse for those enmeshed in criminal activity and cut off from the protection of the police and law. Studies on young women's violence and gang related offending demonstrate that young women living socially marginalised lives also choose to engage in confrontations with the intention of seriously hurting their victims (Miller, 2004; Miller & Decker, 2001). These circumstances are in evidence in the murder of Tom by Bridgit and her partner, Bob. There was a build up of resentment by Bridgit and Bob against Tom who had entered their home threatening violence and stealing money and drugs. This event was a source of conflict to which Bridgit and Bob then set about exacting retribution, motivated by revenge and anger. The judge explained Bridgit's actions in his summary:

Through [Bob]'s associates in the drug trade he and you commenced to make enquiries in an endeavour to identify the two persons who had entered your home. You both told all those who would listen that once the identification of the assailants was known to you swift retribution would be inflicted upon those

responsible for the attack...You and [Bob] then proceeded to prepare for the consequence of that run through. You obtained the use of steel capped boots in order to assault the perpetrators of the offence (Bridgit, SCV, 2000, pp. 120-121).

The murder of Samuel also involved all participants having a history of criminal convictions. Caty, Leigh and her ex-partner Jason were motivated by revenge for the damage caused to their cars by Samuel and anger over an earlier fight connected to a previous conflict in which Samuel had described Jason as a 'dog', or police informer (Caty & Leigh, SCV (A), 2002, p. 6). According to the judge in sentencing all three offenders, 'their anger was the greater because they believed that the issue with [Samuel's partner] had been sorted out with her by apologies from [Leigh and Jason]' (Caty & Leigh, SCV (A), 2002, p. 6). They subsequently sought revenge and made preparations to give Samuel a beating.

Cherry's murder of Garry too was committed in the context of revenge. According to evidence, Cherry, her new boyfriend, Geoff, and Garry were all drug-users and had extensive criminal histories. Cherry blamed Garry for the removal of her two children into the custody of the Department of Human Services (Cherry, SCV (A), 1998, p. 5). Her revenge for the removal of her children is also enacted in the aftermath of his death, where she mutilates his body (Cherry, SCV (A), 1998, p. 5). According to the judge Cherry was seen:

chopping at the head of the [Garry] with a tomahawk. With each blow she was heard to say words like, "This is for the children. This is for the misery you have caused me" (Cherry, SCV (A), 1998, p. 5).

This form of revenge is identified in masculine forms of homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1985; Polk, 1994). Similar to Bridgit and Caty and Leigh, Cherry also sought some form of justice to avenge her perceived losses.

Trish, Jill and Mary were involved in a sub-culture of criminal life in their work as prostitutes and their use of drugs and this, in part, could be related to their conflict with Adriana. However, while the source of conflict in the murders of Samuel and Tom were clear, the source of conflict and motivation for revenge, according to the judge, appeared less obvious in Adriana's murder. In Trish's retrial, in which she pleaded guilty to manslaughter, the judge in his sentencing described three possible key motives:

On the one version it was because she was thought to be a police informer.

Another possible reason was that she had reneged on an agreement to share accommodation with [Mary]. Yet another possible reason is that she had become romantically involved with a former lover of [Mary] (Trish, SCV (A) 2005, p. 3).

In the sentencing of Trish and Jill, the judge dismissed all of these possible motives surmising that their assertion that she was an informer to be 'thin' evidence of motive (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 4). It was the judge's view that 'there was scarcely a convincing motive' for Trish and Jill to kill the deceased (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3). Although the judge was not convinced any of these circumstances were plausible, Trish, Jill and Mary made plans based on revenge for what they thought were her inappropriate but seemingly insignificant behaviours. Brookman (2005, p. 131) also found in her study on homicide insignificant factors emerging as motives for revenge killings.

The evidence indicates that Jin also had resentment towards Molly for what she perceived to be Molly's inappropriate behaviours. The planning of Molly's murder was built around the motive of revenge. This is evidenced in the prosecution's reference to Jin's interview to police in which they described a 'continuing sense of animosity that [Jin] expresses towards [Molly] and readily admits her plan to smack her a bit, wake her up, (with) a couple punches...' (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 561-564). The judge had another view of what motivated Jin and believed she was 'currying favour with [Ian]...' and that she was jealous of Molly (Jin, SCV (A), 2001, p. 9). It is likely that both revenge and jealousy fuelled Jin's beliefs that Molly's transgressions justified the plan to assault her. This behaviour of consciously deploying violence as a rational solution to a disagreement has been found in other studies concerned with understanding women's violence (Banwell, 2010; Daly, 2010; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997).

All of these six homicides motivated by revenge involved the build up of resentment and anger towards their victims for a perceived wrongdoing or inappropriate behaviour. In five of these homicides motivated by revenge, both the offenders and victims were involved in criminal activities that formed a framework for the settlement of their disputes. All of the offenders sought retaliatory action to obtain some form of justice to avenge their losses. These planned attacks motivated by revenge are associated with typically masculine forms of conflict resolution (Brookman, 2005; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Polk, 1994).

Jealousy

Two cases in the planned murders involved women killing as a result of jealousy. One case involved the killing of a sexual rival; the other offender was motivated by jealousy

of the deceased's attributes. Jealousy, which motivated Roberta's behaviour, is recognised as a characteristic of young women's violence and is typically related to conflicts over boyfriends and disputes in friendships (Miller, 2004; Miller & Mullins, 2006). The killing of Julie, however, is not typical of young women's violence, as there was no evidence of conflict between the two. Roberta's jealousy was more of a predatory nature that is usually characteristic of men who kill their partners arising out of relationship separations, and circumstances of sexual jealousy and revenge (Brown et al., 1999; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986; Women's Coalition Against Violence, 1994). However, there was no intimate relationship, apart from what was perceived as a friendship, between the two young women. There is nothing in the evidence to suggest that any of Julie's behaviour can be linked to Roberta's actions. In sentencing Roberta the judge described what he believed were the two key motivations driving her:

I suspect that the twin fires of a powerful obsession with the perceived attributes of [Julie], and intense hatred of her for possessing them, increasingly consumed your thoughts, driving out any serious consideration of the practical unreality of achieving your desire, and motivated you to act before you were fully prepared...(Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 8).

The judge stated that Julie would never have suspected Roberta's motives. He went on to say that no normal young person would have 'contemplated the terrible existence of such a chilling design or that she was the subject of such hatred' (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 7). There was very little of Roberta's life history that is available to the court that can account for her violence.

Jane, like Roberta, enacted predatory behaviours that are typically associated with masculine forms of violence (Brown et al., 1999; Polk, 1994). Jane's defence, in his summary, described her behaviour as being fuelled by her obsession with Jim:

the killing, the murder fits into those classes of cases where there is an obsession of one person for another and which is then created a situation where all capacity for judgement has disappeared and this has taken place as a result of precisely that (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1808).

The judge in his sentencing also described what the defence saw as an obsession with stalking:

These included going around to hotels where he might be drinking, looking for his car in streets, looking in his belongings when they were living together, collecting information and keepsakes, including telephone numbers and addresses, carrying out surveillance and telephoning him in places where she thought he might be. She also extended this stalking to people associated with him, including telephoning his bosses and his women friends ...at times the intrusiveness of stalking increased (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1814).

The judge noted that her late night behaviour was 'audacious' and that:

she was rewarded as he did return to her. However, when he left her again she had to resort to her behaviour of searches and confrontations and remonstrations with [ex-boyfriend] (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1814).

In an appeal hearing, in which Jane contested her conviction and sentence, the judge argued that there was never a challenge to the fact that Jane killed Miriam:

The jury could have been in no doubt as to the strength of the applicant's motive for killing the deceased. She was plainly infatuated with Jim and the strength of her obsession had been demonstrated in a variety of ways, such as her invasion of [another of Jim's girlfriends] premises and the number of telephone calls she had made to the deceased (Jane, SCVA, 1999, p. 20).

Jane's behaviour is not dissimilar to the behaviour of men who stalk and kill their rivals. Although statistically women are overwhelmingly among the victims of men's violence in intimate relationships, there is evidence in homicide studies that some women do kill their rivals and in the context of jealousy (Chan, 2001; Mouzos, 2003; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003). Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006, p. 134) found in their examination of women's narratives of their violent crimes that the second most common motivation for their violence was jealousy usually driven by the discovery of their partner's infidelity. Although these women did not kill the target of their jealousy it supports the evidence of this study that jealousy will provoke women's violence in some instances.

Similar to men who believe they are entitled to violate their partners or children, there is evidence from the judge in his sentencing which indicates that Jane killed Miriam because she felt a sense of entitlement to force Jim back into her life. Jane's stalking, according to the judge, had previously been successful, as Jim had returned to her on other occasions. The evidence indicates that the murder of Miriam was the accumulation of a series of behaviours designed to maintain Jane's control in her

relationship with Jim. The following comments by Jim are used by the prosecution to describe how her stalking affected his life and, in particular, his relationship with other women:

Wherever I went, whenever we separated, no matter where I went she would track me down and whenever I commenced a new relationship she would do things which threatened that relationship (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 59).

This use of violence to regain control over a sexual partner is typically seen in scenarios of male violence where men are seeking to assert their dominance over their female partner (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Polk, 1994, p. 56). The target of the man's violence is usually his intimate female partner, although in some cases the offender kills their sexual rival (Brown et al., 1999; Daly & Wilson, 1988, p. 184; Polk, 1994, p. 54). Wallace (1986, p. 150) concluded that homicides involving sexual rivals are associated more with issues of power and control than passion. These circumstances of a female killing her sexual rival are considered very unusual (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). Jane, like Wendy, also acted out of self-interest, although she did so for other reasons, whereas Wendy acted for financial reasons. As previously noted, Chan (2001, pp. 76-77) views these circumstances in which women act of self-interest as representing the 'darker side of women's offending'.

Summary of motivations

Six homicides motivated by revenge involved the build up of resentment and anger towards their victims for a perceived wrongdoing or inappropriate behaviour. In five of these homicides motivated by revenge, both the offenders and victims were involved in criminal activities that formed a framework for the settlement of their disputes. All of

the offenders sought retaliatory action to obtain some form of justice to avenge their losses. Two cases in these planned murders involved women killing as a result of jealousy. One case involved the killing of a sexual rival with the other offender motivated by her jealousy of the deceased's attributes. Only one woman was motivated to kill for financial benefit. While these scenarios of violence generated by revenge, anger and jealousy are typically associated with masculine forms of violence, they provide evidence that women's violence is expressed across a number of diverse circumstances.

Key characteristics of planned murders

There are six distinguishing characteristics of these planned murders that set them apart from those murders that were unplanned. Planned murders were more likely to include men, multiple weapons were more likely to be used, the death of the victim was likely to involve their entrapment, alcohol and drugs were used to strategise the execution of their assaults, including reducing the resistance of the victim, in the aftermath of each murder it was more likely for the body to be disposed of or hidden and the women offenders were less likely to display remorse for their actions. With all of these assaults careful attention went into the planning of each attack. This level of planning in female homicide is considered rare, and is usually discussed in the context of either serial and multiple murders or unusual cases (Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010).

The use of alcohol and drugs

Ten of the twelve women involved in these planned attacks had a history of significant drug and alcohol use. In seven of the eight murders alcohol and drugs were critical precipitating factors with both the victim and perpetrators affected by their use of drugs and alcohol. This relationship between alcohol and drugs and homicide is identified in other Australian and international studies (Brookman, 2005; Chan & Payne, 2013; Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003, 2005; Polk, 1994; Vireuda & Payne, 2010). The evidence suggests that women strategised the use of drugs and/or alcohol in the execution of their violent assaults.

In five of these planned murders, the women were highly intoxicated by alcohol and/or in a drug-induced state to execute their assault. This is illustrated in the murder of Adriana. According to the judge in the sentencing of Trish and Jill, the three offenders met up and consumed a range of illegal drugs, including cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy. The judge described how they then went to Adriana's flat and smoked more cannabis and obtained cocaine, which was 'snorted' at another stop en route to their destination (Jill & Trish, SCV (A) 2002, p. 3). While it is difficult to speculate whether this was also part of a plan to subdue Adriana, it is likely they would have known that her intoxication would have made her less resistant to the attack. This use of drugs and alcohol was described by the judge as excessive and likely to have affected their judgment and emotional stability. In the sentencing of Trish and Jill, the judge makes the following comment around what he perceived to be the relationship between their drug use and violence:

As to the excessive use of mind-altering drugs, I need say little. All four women, before getting to [location], had overindulged in a cocktail of stimulants. I have never before encountered a situation where such awful injuries have been inflicted by a woman or women. They could only have been inflicted in a drug-induced frenzy. Particularly as neither of you has a background indicative of a propensity for violence (Jill & Trish, SCV (A) 2002, p. 4).

Similarly, intoxication was deliberately sought by Bob in order to coerce co-offenders and make them compliant in their preparations to assault the victim. One of the co-offenders in a witness statement tendered to the court explained how Bob, as a way of coercing the involvement of their three co-offenders, supplied them with marijuana and amphetamines. The evidence suggests that Bob deliberately drugged everyone as a mechanism to maintain his control over them, and to facilitate an environment that enabled the others to kidnap and murder Tom. The following sentencing comments by the judge in Bob's court case link his behaviours to his criminal activities related to drug activities:

the criminal conduct was itself in enforcement of other criminality – your drug operations. It was punishment, and a warning to others. You were a drug dealer and stand-over man; not just a consumer. In this sentence you are not punished for being a drug dealer and a stand-over man but you are punished for the aggravating fact that this whole criminal operation which led to the death of the [deceased] was planned affected as part of criminal enforcement instead of recourse to the law (Bridgit, SCV, 2000, pp. 11-12).

Bridgit's participation in this violent assault and her decision-making around the use of drugs, like the other women who used drugs in their violent assaults, was strategic. Similar to other studies on women involved in illegal activity in which women were found to be negotiating their life options, the evidence in this study also suggests these women who were involved in using drugs were driven by their own criminal agency (Daly, 2010; Denton, 2001; Maher, 1997; Miller 2004). Bridgit operated in a social milieu where violence was normative. Evidence from other studies of young women involved in gangs is consistent with this finding (Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller, 2004). Although these studies are not concerned with young women who have committed homicide, they show that young women involved in criminal activity can also be involved in violent activity.

Cherry together with Geoff, James and their co-offenders were intoxicated prior to the murder of Garry. Roberta, too, had factored into her plans the intoxication of Julie. However, Roberta was to later confirm that Julie was not interested in drinking the alcohol that was purchased. The judge noted in his summary that Roberta's personal papers were found following the murder, in which she described her plans to drug Julie by using a toxic cloth over her mouth and also lacing her pizzas with 'drowsy powder' (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 7). Wendy, too, purchased drugs, which were to be used to overpower Victor. According to the judge in sentencing Wendy, she had intended injecting Victor with heroin in her planned assault:

A further component of your plan was to inject [Victor] with a syringe containing heroin. It was the Crown case that you administered this yourself, shortly before [Victor]'s death... You had also brought with a proladone, otherwise known as oxycodone pectinate, suppository for use, apparently, as a

sedative; and in Sibel you found a person willing to insert it...(Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 2).

As the evidence indicates, similar to other homicide research, in seven of these eight planned murders, women strategised the use of drugs and/or alcohol in the execution of their violent assaults. Alcohol use is also frequently associated with 'deaths involving physical altercations, blunt force injuries and stab wounds' (Morgan & McAtamney, 2009, p. 3). This finding is again comparable to the offences committed by the women in these planned attacks, as the majority was characterised by physical force and stabbing.

The women's use of drugs was also linked to their involvement in other criminal activities and patterns of behaviour in which the women were purposefully negotiating actions that were to lead to the deaths of their victims. These women operated within a social milieu that condoned the use of violence. This pattern of using violence to resolve disputes is evidenced in studies of young women involved in gangs (Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller, 2004; Daly, 2010). Maher (1997, pp. 123-125) discusses women using violence in the illicit drug economy to fend off threats to their personal or economic security, describing these incidents of violence as 'occupational disputes', which invariably would involve women in 'stand up fights' with other women. This pattern of violence, which arises out of criminality, is also described by Polk (1994, p. 25) where he argues that people operating outside the boundaries of conventional society are closed off from the use of legitimate conflict resolution procedures. He argues that, for people positioned in the criminal community, resort to legal or other arbitration systems could be deemed as a life threatening matter or financially inaccessible (Polk, 1994, p. 134).

Acting alone or in the company of others

Of the eight planned murders, six were committed by women acting in concert with other co-offenders. Two murders were committed by a sole female offender. This is in contrast to the unplanned murders in which all, with the exception of one, were committed by a sole offender. This finding of women killing with others is consistent with other research (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2008; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). Mouzos (2003, p. 190), while finding that women could kill on their own, also found women were more likely to kill in concert with another offender, when they killed either a female or male not related to her.

These cases under review indicate that when women kill with co-offenders they are likely to be in planned attacks and more likely to kill with men. Of the six planned attacks involving co-offenders, there are a total of five murders involving men, with different combinations of men and women. The total number of men involved in the group murders ranged from one to four. Men dominated in numbers in three of these five planned attacks and there was only ever one female offender. In the other two murders there were two females and one male. However, one murder involved women only: three women co-offenders.

Table 7.1: Total number of men involved in group murders that were planned

| Total numbers of men involved | Numbers of murders |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 2 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 4 | 1 |

In homicide studies where women are known to kill with men and who willingly participate in the kidnap and murder of victims, the women are typically described as being entrapped in the emotional abuse and servitude of men (Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Steffensmeir, 2009). Mouzos (2003, p. 202) found that when men were involved they had a coercive influence on the woman's behaviour. Polk (1994, pp. 134-135) explained that usually when women are involved in planned homicides with men, they are swept up in the events and are either peripheral or passive in these scenarios. In contrast, in this study, there is no evidence to indicate that men either entrapped women or dominated and coerced them to participate in these planned attacks. Indeed, the women were dominant over others and were central participants in the planning and execution of these assaults. Although two of the women, Jin and Cherry, did not directly kill their victims, their actions facilitated the murder of the victims.

Men's involvement and the roles they played

In this study, of the six murders involving men, five were planned attacks. Of the five planned attacks involving men, four involved one man having a central role in the planning and execution of these assaults. In three of these murders a dominant man gathered around him other men over whom he already had some control. In one of these murders the dominant male was an older brother to the other male co-offender, who was, according to court evidence, under the thrall of his older brother. In the other two cases, the other male co-offenders were involved in criminal activities focused on the drug trade with the dominant man. The other men in these murders played various roles in the death of the victim, some to greater degrees than others. One man was involved in the death of a victim with two female co-offenders and he was vulnerable to the dominant female who planned this attack. Extreme violence was a feature of all the

murders involving men. This theme of extreme violence is typical in homicides involving men (Brown et al., 1999, p. 16; Polk, 1994). The perpetrators also used multiple methods of killing, including stabbing and assaultive force, and the deaths of victims were brutal and cruel.

In the two scenarios involving a dominant male and male co-offenders involved in criminal activities, the dominant man used drugs to engage and cement their support. This dominant man was intimidating and threatened revenge if loyalty to him was betrayed, as illustrated by the murder of Garry. The judge in his summation described Geoff's behaviour:

You stood over and threatened the life of [James] to ensure he remained loyal to you and you threatened the lives of all the persons involved (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999 p. 3).

Geoff had also included Cherry in his violent threats. However, he did not intimidate Cherry. Their relationship, like the relationship between Bridgit and Bob, was recently established. Despite the newness of their relationships, they were sufficiently bonded to execute each assault in partnership. The judge in his sentencing of Cherry makes this observation of their relationship:

You married [Geoff] on [date], five weeks after the offence. When you acted as you did on [dates], in your marriage on [date], and in the Homicide interview on [date], you were well in control of what you were doing. You were in no fear of your co-accused. Rather, he was, and he remains, besotted by you (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5).

Similarly, the older brother who was the dominant male in the murder of Molly also did not intimidate Jin. It was the judge's view that Jin used the murder as a way of 'currying favour with [Ian]...' (Jin, SCV (A), 2001, p. 9).

Although there was a dominant man, other male co-offenders played a key role in the deaths of the victims as is illustrated in the killing of Tom. In sentencing the three other male co-offenders involved in Tom's murder, the judge described their conduct:

each of the three of you was a party to a night of terror and physical abuse for the hapless deceased, who ultimately was killed at [location]...Each of you knew that a shotgun and a baseball bat were taken to deceased's home. Each of you saw how the deceased was captured, bound, gagged, assaulted while helpless, threatened with secateurs, terrorised by five aggressors, four of whom were hooded...over a lengthy period, a number of hours, and in three different places...Not one of you helped the deceased. You could have, but you did not. Not one of you separated yourself from the conduct by leaving it. Indeed, you all went, later, to the casino, to give yourselves a false alibi. Your callous conduct is to be condemned (Peter, Laurie & Brian, SCV (A) 1999, p. 7).

In these murders involving men, all of the women played a significant role. All female offenders were willing initiators of the violence, active in the confrontation, and capable of excessive violence and instilling fear. The women acted as co-conspirators and collaborators, contributing significantly to planning efforts including the entrapment and luring of the victim and execution of the murder. For example, Bridgit was

considered an equal partner in the preparation of this assault on Tom. The judge in his sentencing of Bridgit explained her role in this operation:

[Bob] was actively encouraged, assisted and supported throughout preparations [for criminal action] by you. When you all left for the deceased premises, [Bob] took a gun with and you took a baseball bat with you (Bridgit, SCV, 2000, p. 122).

These scenarios of women acting as accomplices with men who dominated in the death of the victim are consistent with other homicide studies (Polk, 1994, p. 148). This type of collaborative behaviour with men is also found in research into women involved in serial killing with men (Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Although the women in this study were not serial killers there are common themes in the planning of their homicides. Like the women in this study, women involved in serial killings actively engage in the planning and execution of each murder, including the disposal of bodies and concealment of their crimes. Of those other men involved in the murder, all were influenced by the behaviour of the women offenders who were active in the planning and murder of the victim. These men were also vulnerable to threats by the women. This included Sean, who was vulnerable to the dominance of Wendy, the primary instigator in the murder of Victor.

Methods of murder

In seven of these eight planned attacks the victims were killed by a variety of methods and a range of weapons. The methods of killing involved beatings, stabbings, strangulation, gunshots and the use of physical force to subdue their victims. This use of multiple methods and weapons led to a pattern of overkill. In summary, Tom, Geoff,

Samuel, Adriana, Victor and Molly were killed by their offenders using either their feet or hands or other objects as weapons to beat and/or stab them to death. A baseball bat was used as a weapon in the killing of Tom. Adriana was beaten with a metal pole in addition to a physical assault. Trish, Jill and Mary subjected Adriana to a physical assault, plus used a rock and broken glass to beat and stab her to death. Caty and Leigh used at least one knife and poles to both stab and assault Samuel. In addition to a physical beating, a lethal injection of heroin was also used by Wendy to kill Victor. This use of multiple methods of killing and the use of physical strength is normally equated to masculine scenarios of homicide (Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). However, this finding of women using their physical strength and weapons with the intention of hurting their victim is also found in Miller and Decker's (2001, p. 124) study of young women involved in gang violence. Two murders involved the shooting of a weapon to kill the victim. However, only one female, Jane, used a gun to murder her victim Miriam, while Cherry was a participant in the murder of Garry who was killed by pen-pistol. Julie was the only victim who was killed by strangulation.

Entrapment is another distinctive feature of these planned murders with four victims kidnapped by the offenders. Entrapment occurred in the murders of Tom, Adriana, Molly and Julie. Tom is the only victim who was aware that he was entrapped; Adriana, Molly and Julie were unaware they were surreptitiously being entrapped. In these cases involving entrapment a great detail of planning was undertaken as is illustrated in the murder of Molly. The judge in his sentencing of Jin described the planning of Molly's entrapment as something resembling 'a military operation' (Jin, SCV (A), 2001, p. 4). According to court evidence a week prior to the beating, a meeting was held outside Jin's family restaurant with the two brothers to plan the attack (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 745).

The prosecution used Jin's record of interview to describe her willingness to participate in the assault, her role in the assault and the actions she undertook:

With regard to Jin she states "the plan was to smack her a bit, wake her up, a couple of punches". She then readily admitted her role in the plan to lure [Molly] to a place where the assault might take place. She accounted ... the plan of the signals that they would use, using blinkers and stop lights and such like, so that the two male prisoners could keep in contact with...Jin herself said that the car park was chosen so that drugs could be smuggled, it being an out of the way spot...(Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 561-562).

The prosecution also argued that Jin's role was powerful and, without her, this crime would not have occurred (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 710 - 711). The comments of the judge also attested to the seriousness of Jin's actions:

The act of betrayal is the...indispensable foundation for this crime, namely that but for the act of betrayal the deceased would not have been where she could have been killed (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 729).

Although Jin did not use any weapons or physically engage in the attack on Molly, she played a central role in the execution of a fully pre-mediated plan to assault Molly. That the planning also involved Molly becoming drug affected and rendering her more vulnerable gives an indication of the degree of detailed planning. This level of detailed planning was also evidenced in the entrapment and murder of Tom. The judge in the sentencing of Bridgit partner's Bob described his actions in the following way:

the criminal conduct, the capture and assault on the deceased, was premeditated, planned and was effected like a 'military operation' (Bob, SCV, 2000, pp. 11-12).

Adriana, like Molly and Julie, was also unaware that she was being entrapped. The judge described how Adriana was convinced to go on a trip with Jill, Trish and Mary:

Talk about the deceased led to talk about bashing the deceased. Talk about bashing her meant working out how to meet up with her. A pretext was needed. The pretext was about a job in [location]. The job was to be portrayed as involving good money and ample drugs. The deceased was telephoned. A meeting was arranged... (Jill & Trish, SCV (A) 2002, p. 2).

The judge explained how various drugs were used en route and outlined the next steps in her murder and the methods used to kill her:

The deceased was told that she was an informer, and was to be dealt with accordingly. She was told that she was not going home. Trish pulled the deceased out of the [car] by her hair... There was argument. There was shouting and screaming. The deceased was knocked to the ground. The two of you punched the deceased around the face and the top of her body. The deceased was able at one point to get up and run, but then she tripped and went to ground again (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3).

The judge continued the narrative of describing Adriana's death by then discussing the murder weapons:

At different stages, two weapons were produced. One was the empty Jacob's Creek red wine bottle. The other was the knife from the kitchen at the [address] flat. The bottle was smashed on a rock by Jill. A piece of the broken bottle was then used to assault the deceased. At another stage, Jill had the knife in her hand. Mary asked Jill for the knife and was given it. Mary straddled the deceased, keeping her pinned to the ground. Mary did not use the knife to stab the deceased. Instead, she stabbed the knife into the ground, away from the head of the deceased. The two of you pushed Mary to one side. The deceased was then assaulted with a vengeance. She was stabbed a number of times with the knife. She was stabbed a number of times with the piece of broken bottle. Then a third weapon was used. I cannot say by whom it was used. The third weapon was a rock almost the size of a football. It was brought down on the head of the deceased with considerable force. The blow or blows with the rock fractured her skull... (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3).

Medical opinion tendered to the court indicated that her death would have occurred within minutes of her skull being fractured. According to the judge in his sentencing of Trish and Jill, Adriana's body was then taken back to the women's flat and discussions were held as to how to dispose of her body. Two men known to the women agreed to help dump her body in a creek bed nearby. As previously stated, the judge described this as a 'brutal frenzied killing'. The judge observed in the sentencing of Trish and Jill that there was nothing in their backgrounds that was 'indicative of a propensity for violence' (Jill & Trish, SCV (A) 2002, p. 4).

Roberta, a sole offender, also consciously and meticulously planned the kidnap and murder of Julie, evidenced in documentation found in her flat. This included notes detailing calculated steps to entrap and murder Julie and then later dispose of her body. The judge referred to the prosecution's narrative to understand the circumstances of the murder. Below is part of this narrative, which includes reference to the detail of the notes found in Roberta's flat:

“On the way to dance school, say that she can't tell anyone that she's meeting me as I'm not allowed to give the study results to anyone - ethics - highly confidential. Not even your boyfriend/parent. Drug Julie (toxic over mouth), put body into army bags and disfigure and dump somewhere way. No car - meet on toilet block - no cameras, people come into the city (maybe to meet friends?) get birth cert - as we will both go licences together then drug her...”(Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 7).

The prosecution cited other pages of this documentation to demonstrate the degree of planning that was undertaken by Roberta. According to this narrative, as demonstrated above, Roberta wanted to convince Julie that she was in a confidential research study that required her to be secretive and to do otherwise would compromise its value. The documentation provided by the prosecution noted Roberta's intention of assuming a false identity. According to the judge, Julie was vulnerable to Roberta as she been involved with her family and she would have no reason to suspect the motives of Roberta given this relationship. The judge also determined that the idea that this project was going to secure Julie with 'heaps of money' would have been appealing to a young woman. The judge considered that the notes reflected 'an abnormal, almost obsessional interest by her in the deceased' (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 7). According to the evidence,

in the summer before Julie's murder, Roberta had asked Julie's mother for her birth date, and later applied for a copy of Julie's birth certificate. These actions provide evidence that Roberta's plan to kill Julie was in her thoughts for at least two months prior to the murder. She was also clearly thinking that one of the likely scenarios would be that people would see Julie's disappearance as a case of a missing person. All of her actions in the months leading up to her abduction were calculated with this outcome in mind.

In summing up the judge described Roberta's planning as possessing:

subtlety and demonstrates the operation of a devious mind, and your possession of considerable manipulative abilities. Your scheme involved a number of steps and some time in its execution with each action carefully undertaken so as to keep your victim under your control and without arousing either her suspicion or that of anyone else. For my part I find the deliberation and malevolence with which you acted extremely disturbing (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 8).

The judge in sentencing reinforced this view that Roberta had planned the murder well in advance:

I am satisfied that you had encompassed her death in your thoughts for a substantial period of time before your finally moved against her...there can be no doubt that your actions were carried out after extensive deliberation and, to a great degree, in a calculated fashion (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 7).

In describing how Roberta killed Julie, the judge used the narrative provided by the prosecutor:

She strangled Julie with a piece of telephone cord which she had with a number of obsolete handsets. She kept Julie's body in the flat for two days – hidden in her wardrobe, the telephone cord still around the dead girl's neck (Roberta, SCV, (A), 2000, p. 4).

In attempting to explain why Roberta killed Julie, the judge stated that there was little known about the circumstances of her offence or of the 'factors and forces' that motivated her to kill. However, he noted that he was confident she was 'a very unhappy young person' (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 11).

Similar to those murders involving the entrapment of the victims where careful planning was put into effect, Jane also was thorough in her plans to murder Miriam. Jane is the only female in these planned attacks that used a gun to kill her victim. In the Court of Appeal the judge described Jane's action and the evidence used by the jury to find her guilty:

It was carefully planned, it was carefully carried out and where considerable attempts were made by the prisoner to ensure that her role in it was not detected...that it was carried out in such a manner that the body of Miriam has not been recovered adds to the gravity of the crime...There is no psychiatric or other evidence advanced to either explain the killing in more mitigatory circumstances or to indicate a mental state that might reduce her culpability...particularly being aware of the fact that this killing was not the result of a sudden and spontaneous outburst of violence, the Prosecution would submit that it is a killing that is a serious one and rather than fall into the lower

end of the range we would submit it falls towards the upper end of the range...
(Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1811).

He continued:

The jury's conclusion that the applicant killed the deceased standing unchallenged, shows that the jury accepted that the applicant must have cleaned the deceased's apartment after she had shot her, and that she secreted the body. The evidence was overwhelming that the applicant took from the flat at least the keys and the deceased's watch, as well as Jim's electric razor. That the applicant took keepsakes or souvenirs from the apartment makes it most unlikely that the killing was involuntary (Jane, SCVA, 1999, p. 20).

More than this though, the judge reflected on further evidence:

But in my view the greatest significance attaches to the fact that the presence of two cartridge cases in the apartment leads inexorably to the conclusion that at least two bullets were fired into the body of the deceased. The fact that the applicant took a loaded firearm to the deceased's apartment makes it inherently unlikely that she went there solely for the purpose of remonstrating or intimidation. That at least two bullets were fired into the [deceased's] body makes it equally unlikely that the shooting was involuntary or the result of an altercation, or in the absence of murderous intent (Jane, SCVA, 1999, p. 20).

In these eight planned assaults the findings indicate that women used multiple methods and weapons to kill their victims. Their selection and use of multiple weapons provides

evidence of their intent to seriously hurt their victims. The use of weapons is also distinguished from the unplanned assaults, in that knives were the primary weapons used to kill victims in these scenarios, whereas multiple weapons were used to kill the victims in planned assaults. These characteristics are not consistent with Kirkwood (2000 p. 181) who found that women who killed people other than a partner or child were more likely to stab their victims. Although these women involved in planned attacks also stabbed their victims, they were more likely to use assaultive force with a range of weapons and to engage in physical assaults to kill their victims. However, in the studies of Miller and Decker (2001), Miller (2004), Miller and Mullins (2008) and Daly (2010) it emerged that young women involved in criminal activity were prepared to engage in physical attacks. These case studies, although few, make it clear that women's agency needs to be taken into account in understanding their violence.

Brutality

A distinguishing feature of all eight planned murders is the brutality and use of excessive violence to kill each victim. Eleven of twelve women in these eight planned assaults have responded to grievances in ways that are typical of masculine scenarios of violence, in that they willfully used violence to resolve their conflict (Polk, 1994; Pease, 1997; Wallace, 1986). Jin and Cherry are the only women who did not directly murder their victim, but their actions played an important role in these two murders. The use of drugs and alcohol was significant in those murders in which the victim was brutally stabbed multiple times and beaten to death. This finding reflects the results of Mann's (1996, p. 65) study in which she found that women who were drug-affected were more likely to have inflicted multiple stab wounds and their murders tended to be more brutal.

The level of brutality demonstrated indicates the capacity of some women to participate in the torture of others and, for some, to find enjoyment in their acts of violence. The severity of the beatings also suggests that some women are capable, like some men, of using excessive violence to murder. There are also similar characteristics in the execution of their lethal violence to female serial and multiple killers and women killing in rare and unusual circumstances. In these circumstances it has been found that women will use extreme levels of violence (Davis, 2001; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Seal, 2010).

Several examples will demonstrate this use of excessive violence. In examining the details of Tom's murder, the court evidence indicates that Bridgit acted violently towards Tom during his abduction and murder. The judge summarised the details of his abduction and murder and the violent manner of his death:

[Tom] got out of his vehicle outside of his home and was immediately set upon by [Bob] and [Peter] and [Laurie] who had been waiting, watching for his return. You were keeping watch nearby and keeping tough with the others of your party, especially [Bob] by mobile phone. The deceased was led away by gunpoint by [Bob] to a paddock area...There a struggle occurred and the deceased's baseball cap and jacket were dislodged...A gun was held to the head of the deceased who was then forcibly and violently placed into the rear of the van. All of the persons except [Brian] were wearing balaclavas. Duct tape was applied to the hands and legs of the deceased. You were still waiting nearby as part of the operation. You were then collected and sat in the front seat of the van (Bridgit, SCV (A) 2000, p. 3).

The judge continued:

[Tom] was assaulted in your presence as he was being driven around [location] and he was threatened, including threatened by you, in order to ascertain the name of his accomplice...In the van [Bob] threatened [Tom] with secateurs...Ultimately your group left there and with [Bob] driving drove some 90 kilometers from [location] through deserted countryside to [location]. The deceased was assaulted and threatened violently in the back by the other men during that drive. When all of you arrived at [location] the deceased was removed from the van and led into the bush by [Bob] and [Bridgit] and with [Peter] accompanying you. In a gully close to where the van was parked the deceased was repeatedly assaulted in a most violent manner by [Bob] and by [Bridgit]. He was also assaulted by [Peter]. The deceased was struck with an aluminium baseball bat by [Bridgit]. He was repeatedly kicked by [Bridgit] with the steel capped boots you had brought to the scene for that very purpose. He was also assaulted with aluminium baseball bat and kicked by [Bob] and in the end very violently attacked by [Bob]...You all left the scene, leaving the deceased to die (Bridgit, SCV (A) 2000, p. 3).

According to one witness, Tom said to [Bob] 'Please kill me' to which [Bob] replied 'I am going to make you suffer'. Bridgit, according to another co-offender, returned to the car bragging about her role in the assault. Prior to this final assault causing his death, in the sentencing of her co-offenders, the judge referred to Bridgit hitting his nose so severely that she broke it (Bridgit, SCV (A), 1999, p. 6).

Another example of brutality is demonstrated in the evidence given by Mary, which is referred to in Trish's Appeal Hearing by the judge when describing the events leading up to Adriana's murder. This excerpt highlights the threatening comments made by the women to Adriana en route to the location where she was eventually killed, making it clear to her that she was going to be hurt or possibly killed:

Mary said that at the last stop was the murder site at [location] after an argument began. Mary said that when that happened Jill had veered off the road saying the words: "We are going to have to do her". According to Mary, Trish then said to the deceased: "You are a dog aren't you, an informer?", and the deceased denied the allegation; Jill then looked at Mary and said: "Here we go"; Trish then said the deceased: "Well it looks like you are not coming home tonight"; and Mary then responded: "You're bloody well right there, that's right" (Trish, SCVA, (A), 2004, p. 6).

According to the judge in sentencing prior to this murder, none of the women had demonstrated a history or propensity for violence. The judge also deemed the escalating violence resulted in all offenders losing a sense of control. Wendy, Sibel and Sean also killed Victor in what the judge described as horrific circumstances:

He was accosted, while asleep, in the bedroom of his home. He was awakened by people attempting to handcuff his wrists, bind his feet, and place a pillow over his head. The horror he must then have experienced is impossible for the rest of us to fully comprehend. This was, moreover, an assault which had been planned for a considerable period. And this is true even if the intention to kill was only formed shortly before the death (Wendy, SCV (A), 2007, p. 3).

Bridgit and Cherry both demonstrated enjoyment in the execution and death of their victims. According to court evidence, both women also made comments, at the time of each murder, suggesting that the murder could serve as an anniversary event, reminding them of when they formed their respective relationships with their co-offenders. In trying to reconcile their feelings of enjoyment during the attack, it was difficult not to believe that their enjoyment was a motivating factor for continued assault. The act of killing became in and of itself a motivating factor, providing a sense of self-gratification for both women. While they were probably not killing for sexual pleasure, their actions were hedonistic in that they sought pleasure from the murder. In the literature on female multiple killers, the hedonistic killer kills for pleasure and sexual gratification (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000, p. 156). While neither of these women had killed multiple victims, there are elements of their behaviour, which replicates this sadism. For example, Bridgit's co-offenders reported her as enjoying the torture of her victim and competing with her partner to see who was inflicting the most harm. The court evidence states that Cherry pretended to have orgasms while she was hitting the decapitated head of her victim.

The distinguishing feature of these planned assaults is the level of brutality and use of excessive violence. This brutality is evidenced by the prolonged and repeated beatings of each victim through the use of multiple weapons, suggesting their intent to cause serious harm to their victims. These cases provide further support to the growing body of feminist research that suggests that women's violence is more complicated than stories of reactive violence (Daly 2008; Morrissey, 2003; Mouzos, 2003; Pearson, 1997, Seal, 2010).

Summary of key characteristics

In summary, ten of the twelve women involved in these planned murders had a history of drug and alcohol use, and in seven of the eight murders alcohol and drugs were critical precipitating factors with the evidence suggesting that women strategised the use of drugs and/or alcohol in the execution of their violent assaults.

Six of these murders involved co-offenders, with a total of five involving men, and one murder involving only women. Two murders were committed by a sole female offender. In those murders involving men the level of violence appeared to escalate and a dominant male would work in partnership with a female to plan and execute the assault. Multiple weapons and methods killed the victims, including physical force, stabbing, beatings, gunshot, lethal injection and strangulation. Their selection and use of multiple weapons provides evidence of their intent to seriously hurt their victims. The use of multiple weapons led to a pattern of overkill and brutality in seven of these eight planned murders. Entrapment was another distinguishing feature of four of these planned murders.

Aftermath of the planned murders

Four distinguishing features occurred in the aftermath of the planned attacks. First, in the preparation for these attacks plans were made to remove evidence and/or dispose of the victim's body. Second, efforts were put into effect to either lay blame elsewhere or to create an alibi for themselves. Third, only two of the twelve women were recognised as expressing genuine remorse for their role in murdering the victim. Fourth, only two of the twelve women were helpful to the police in their investigations and

other professionals, making it difficult for both investigators and the court to completely understand the circumstances of their crime and motivations.

In four of these eight planned murders, the body was left at the scene of the crime and plans were put in place to remove any evidence that would implicate the offenders. For example, when Jin and the two brothers set in place their plans to assault Molly, they also discussed and agreed upon a plan to lay blame elsewhere. The judge describes her first conversations with police in which she tried to avert blame elsewhere:

even as the victim was lying beside you, you were adopting and promoting [co-offender] method of laying a false trail to deflect detection...having the presence of mind to lie to police to distance yourself from the crime, as the victim lay nearby (Jin, SCV, 2000, p. 751).

According to court evidence, the older brother responsible for the attack on Molly, had written a note on the night in which they all met at Jin's family restaurant. This note, according to the judge, was left 'as a false trail, a decoy to defeat police investigation' and it stated:

This is payback for insulting the Muslim religion and holy Koran, Allah Akbah.
Also for the drug money you owed us (Jin, SCV (A) 2001, p. 3).

The court was unable to prove that Jin had awareness of this note being left at the scene. However, the prosecution asserted that had Jin been aware of the contents of the note, she would have been 'guilty to murder with the same logic' as was applied to the older brother (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 564).

Court evidence records Bridgit, Bob and the other co-offenders leaving the scene of the murder and leaving the deceased to die at the creek where he was assaulted (Bridgit, SCV (A), 2000, p. 3). Their plans also included putting in place an alibi. According to the judge following his murder they all went to the premises of a relative, changed clothes and left for the casino:

You all went to [Brian]'s premises in [location] where you changed your clothes and then you all attended at the casino in [location] in order to give yourselves a previously arranged false alibi for that night...(Bridgit, SCV (A) 2000, p. 3).

Not only was Bridgit active in the brutal murder of Tom, but like Jin, she also had the presence of mind to be thinking of the consequences of being found responsible for the death and put in place actions to deflect detection elsewhere. In the remaining four planned murders, the offenders removed the body from the homicide scene. For example, following the murder of Adriana, Trish, Mary and Jill put her body into the boot of the car and discussions were held to torch the car with the body in it (Jill & Trish, SCV (A), 2002, p. 3). This idea was rejected and the next morning her body was moved with the help of two men. The judge uses the evidence of Mary in Trish's Appeal Hearing to describe how the body was disposed of:

Mary said that once at [location] they turned into a little side dirt track and stopped after a short distance. She said that Jill attempted to dig a hole with a shovel. According to Mary, Trish then asked her to give her the keys to the car, which she did and Trish opened the boot in order to get our the body. Mary said that she refused to assist and so Trish, Jill and [male] had taken it out. But they

were unable to dig a grave in the dry ground and so they had thrown the body over the side of an embankment. Mary said that she got a towel out of the car and went down to the deceased's body and wiped it in order to remove any fingerprints... (Trish, SCVA (A), 2004, p. 8).

It is difficult to know if they panicked in their attempts to dispose of the body and possibly may not have anticipated this difficulty in burying her. However, they had the presence of mind to remove evidence. These acts could be viewed as incongruous with feelings of remorse or shame for their actions. They simply left her body, like Bridgit left Tom's body, exposed to the likely predation of animals.

Jane, too, went to great lengths to ensure that her role in the murder of Miriam was not discovered and displayed similar behaviours of indifference to Miriam's body in the aftermath of her death. The prosecution in their summary of how the crime should be viewed for sentencing purposes characterised her conduct in the following way:

It was carefully planned...and considerable attempts were made ... to ensure that her role was not detected ... that it was carried out in such a manner that the body of the deceased has not been recovered...adds to the gravity of the crime (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1811).

In Jane's comments to the police following the murder she denies any jealous behaviour towards Jim and his girlfriends, knowledge of Miriam and denial of any harassment of Miriam at the day in which Miriam was said to be killed. This is reflected in comments she made in two police interviews, which were tendered to the High Court in 2001:

On [date], police took a formal statement from the applicant...She further denied specific knowledge of the deceased or any harassment of [Jim] or his girlfriends...The applicant was arrested on [date] and interviewed. She denied that she was familiar with the area [location] or that she was aware that the deceased had been involved in a relationship with [Jim]. She denied being outside the flat of the deceased at [date] and denied telephoning her home (Jane, HCA, 2001, pp. 2-5).

Roberta too demonstrated a disconcerting indifference to her victim's body. After strangling Julie, Roberta kept her body in a cupboard for two days. Based on the prosecution's narrative and including evidence from an interview with a psychologist, the judge explained what happened when her father came to check on her welfare and how she disposed of Julie's body:

She kept [Julie's] body in the flat for two days - hidden in her wardrobe, the telephone cord still around the dead girl's neck. The body was there when she closed the door to discourage her father from entering the room on one occasion, when he visited her after hearing that she was sick. She had given a sketch account of the removal of the body from her flat in [location], from the first time I interviewed her. She wrapped [Julie] in rugs, and placed her body in a large army bag, which she had purchased. The bag has never been found, although she can recall where she left it at her father's farm at [location]. She says that she told the taxi truck driver that they were delivering a sculpture...Later she was able to discuss, though with extreme difficulty, the burial of the body in a hastily dug shallow grave on her father's farm (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 4).

According to court evidence, Roberta's plan also involved her returning to work to and securing monies from a friend and a bank, so she could escape without being caught by police.

In the aftermath of Geoff's murder, Cherry attempted to hide evidence of her involvement. According to court evidence she first cleaned up the premises in which Geoff was killed. The judge in sentencing Cherry stated that she first 'busied [herself] in attempting to clean the blood from the [premises]... Indeed, when the two men took the body to the car, you remained alone in the house finishing up the cleaning...' (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 4). In the aftermath Cherry also displayed great cruelty and enjoyment in the dismemberment of Geoff's body. The judge in his sentencing of Cherry described this behaviour:

You took a tomahawk, attacked the severed head of the deceased, hit it numerous times and virtually destroyed it. As you did so, you said: "This is for this, this is for that", referring to previous incidents between yourself and the deceased. You remained in the garage and when [Garry] was putting the deceased's body parts into a pillow case, you sat in a vehicle observing what he was doing. You were smiling at what you saw and what you had done (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 4).

The judge explained that she appeared to enjoy the mutilation of Geoff's body:

You had previously said to [Garry] you wanted to have your fun with the severed head. When hitting the head, you were making loud noises as though you were having an orgasm. [Garry] had to tell you to quieten down. You told

[witness] that you had cut the testicles of the deceased from his body and that you had enjoyed doing that (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5).

Not only did the women demonstrate disrespect to their victims' bodies but also, in the aftermath of each crime, they lied to police about their involvement and provided different versions of events. The judge described Cherry as having 'told a series of lies to the police' (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5). The judge highlighted that her demeanor in her interview with the Homicide Squad officers was 'one of complete confidence and self-assurance. It was a virtuoso performance' (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5). As previously discussed, Cherry also married her co-offender Garry five weeks after the murder of Geoff. This, according to the judge, provided further evidence of being 'well in control of what you were doing' (Cherry, SCV (A), 1999, p. 5).

Although Jin eventually voluntarily disclosed her involvement, like Bridgit, Jane and Rachael, she initially provided a number of different versions of the event and was unhelpful to police investigations. According to court evidence, Bridgit, in her record of interview, provided five different versions of the event and denied most things asked of her. Jin also attempted to convey to the police that her actions were fuelled by concern regarding Molly's ongoing use of drugs and her relationship with the co-offender. Her defence argued that her motives were to get Molly 'off drugs' and to 'terminate forever any relationship with co-accused' (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 726-727). In the judge's consideration of Jin's comments in her record of interview where she claimed that she wanted to 'knock some sense into her', he rejected her assertions:

Her purpose was a misguided notion of correction and education...Your purpose was not in order to persuade deceased not to use drugs, because you

were doing the very opposite: you were buying heroin with her and using it with her. It was not to knock some sense into her to avoid [Ian]...because you were doing the very opposite: you were encouraging and facilitating [Ian] pursuing her on that very night. Significantly, your lack of response and concern, in particular your continuing and promoting the plan to secure the escape of [Ian] after the terrible assault on the deceased, unequivocally establishes that your purpose was not concern for the deceased (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 757- 758).

The third key characteristic of the aftermath is a distinct lack of remorse or sorrow expressed by ten of these twelve women involved in these planned attacks. This finding is consistent with other homicides motivated by revenge (Brookman, 2005, p. 140).

Although this material was presented in an inconsistent manner, there was sufficient evidence suggesting that ten of the twelve of these offenders involved in planned attacks failed to demonstrate remorse in the immediate aftermath of the murders. Of the twelve women, only Sibel and Mary were considered by the courts to have expressed remorse from the initial stages of the murder inquiry.

Rather than feeling remorse, Jin attempted to justify her actions. For example, Jin felt her actions were justified as Molly was, according to her, 'a bitch' and had many enemies. She also believed that a beating would 'knock some sense into her'. Jin, like Cherry and Jane, displayed varying degrees of belligerence when being interviewed by police. For example, the prosecution in observations of Jin's interview with police describes her as having a demeanor of 'swaggering pride' for the role she played in Molly's death (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 557). The prosecution used the following excerpt from Jin's [J] first record of interview to police (P) as an indication of her callousness:

- J: How is Molly?
- P: She is in a serious condition and may die.
- J: No one will be upset. She got what she deserved. She was a bitch.
- P: That may be so but nobody deserves what happened to her.
- J: Maybe, but she had it coming.

(Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 563).

The prosecution in arguing her guilt suggested that in the interview 'there is a continuing sense of animosity that Jin expresses towards deceased' (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 563-564). The psychologist, in giving evidence to the court, agreed that the transcript of her record of interview showed neither remorse nor conscience for what happened to the deceased, and her attitude was that her actions were justified (Jin, SCV, 2001, pp. 663-664). The judge concluded that 'her lack of remorse reflects more of a troubled woman as opposed to someone demonstrating an appalling callousness' (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 705). The prosecution had a different view on this position stating 'that she is a troubled person who publicly expressed an appalling attitude to her actions' (Jin, SCV, 2001, p. 706).

Jane, like Jin, was also belligerent in her interviews with police. The court evidence indicates that she was not interested in helping police in their investigations. The prosecution highlighted Jane's lack of remorse and observed behaviour in court:

We would submit that indeed, it has been, I think, conceded by our learned friend, that there has been no display of remorse, not even the limited display of remorse that can be demonstrated by one who denies involvement, and Your

Honour has been in a position to observe the prisoner throughout the conduct of the trial (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1811).

The judge commented on Jane's behaviour in his sentencing describing his puzzlement at her lack of remorse:

I have noted that I have been intrigued in more than one respect as to your behaviour. The level of puzzlement might have been alleviated by psychiatric or psychological evidence. However, I recognise that there could be good reasons for there being no such evidence before me ... there is nothing to indicate that you feel any remorse for the killing of Miriam. Because it was a premeditated and remorseless murder (Jane, SCV, 1999, p. 1818).

Similar to Jane who made no admission of guilt, Trish was silent about her role in the murder of Adriana. The judge in sentencing stated that she 'gave a "no comment" record of interview and have never gone on record with your version of events, although you told [psychologist]...that you were not involved in the actual assault and did not stab anyone' (Trish, SCV (A) 2005, p. 2). The judge in the Court of Appeal states that she declined any comment on legal advice (Trish, SCVA (A), 2004, p. 4). It could be speculated that for both Trish and Jane, an expression of remorse could have been seen as admission of guilt. As both were contesting their court verdicts, their lack of expressed remorse could be for these reasons.

According to the judge, Roberta, too, was either unwilling or unable to provide information in relation to her background or the crime (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 9). In his sentencing of Roberta, the judge, while acknowledging that she was an unhappy

young woman with a depressed emotional state, also drew attention to her lack of humanity:

What is apparent in the material before the court in relation to your planning is the total absence of any suggestion or impression that you ever gave thought to the individuality or the humanity of your victim, or any sense of the significance of taking a life. You appear to have been totally self-absorbed, concerned only with your own life situation, feelings and desires (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 8).

The judge further explained the context of her remorse:

I accept that you are indeed remorseful and consider that it is likely that that sense will increase with the passage of time although I am by no means confident that you have yet developed any real degree of insight into the true significance of what you have done, and suspect that much of you current reaction is based on self-pity (Roberta, SCV (A), 2000, p. 12).

Remorse, for Roberta, like those other women who displayed any, would often come after long periods of time and during interviews with professionals who were preparing them for their respective court trials. For example, in Bridgit's trial, a minister of religion provided a character reference stating that she was convinced of her sincerity in owning up to her responsibilities for the crime (Bridgit, SCV, 2000, p. 112). The judge appears to have been influenced by this character reference and in sentencing described this witness as helpful, and made the further comment regarding Bridgit's remorse:

I consider that you now do have remorse albeit late for your offence both by reason of your plea of guilty and by reason of the helpful evidence of [Reverend] (Bridgit, SCV (A), 2000, p. 6).

Bridgit's admission of remorse is also likely to have been postured for the purposes of her defence strategies.

The inability to appreciate the suffering of their victims is demonstrated in the murder of Adriana. According to Mary's evidence that is referred to by the judge in Trish's Court of Appeal, the women on the return journey failed to respond to what were noises coming from the boot of the car.

[Mary] said that after driving for about five minutes she heard two loud thumps from the boot and that Jill or Trish said: "She's still alive can you hear the thumps?" Mary said that Trish then turned up the music in the car and that they drove on... (Trish, SCVA (A), 2004, p. 7).

A possible explanation is that each woman was overwhelmed by the enormity of what had occurred. Although they had each deliberately planned to seriously hurt Adriana, they may not have anticipated either their emotional or physical responses to her murder. Irrespective of the causes of their conduct, they were negligent in their inability to put Adriana's life ahead of their own needs. Although the autopsy results presented in evidence indicates that Adriana was likely to have died in the attack, this is not a fact the women would have known. Similar to the other women who killed, these three young women were not able to connect to the suffering of their victim. Rather than feeling regret for the assault and taking actions to save her, if she was alive, they chose

to ignore the sounds. It is also possible to consider that if she were alive there would have been a witness to the crime. Whether this was a reason as to why they chose to ignore the sounds is again speculative. The women remained affected by their drug use and may also have been unable to respond for this reason.

Far from feeling remorse after the offence, some of the women sought to boast of their actions. For example, following the murder of Tom, both Bob and Bridgit were reported to have collected clippings from the paper and bragged about their involvement. Sibel and Mary were the only women involved in planned attacks that were recorded in the court as having demonstrated genuine remorse for the killing of their victims. In sentencing Mary, the judge stated that 'All the evidence, from how you first dealt with the police to your plea of guilty, points to you being genuinely remorseful' (Mary, SCV (A), 2002, p. 4). There is also evidence that Sibel confessed to her offence and was co-operative with police investigations, which again was construed as a sign of her remorse. The judge in sentencing confirmed her remorse by stating:

You too have expressed genuine and deep remorse for your part in killing [Victor]. Your offer to plead guilty to the charge of manslaughter came at an early stage and is consistent with this remorse (Sibel, SCV (A), 2007, p. 7).

In summary there are four distinguishing features that occurred in the aftermath of these planned attacks. First, in the preparation for these attacks plans were made to remove evidence and/or dispose of the victim's body that would implicate the offenders. Second, efforts were put into effect to either lay blame elsewhere or to create an alibi for themselves. Third, the women displayed an emotional detachment and callousness towards the victim's body. Remorse, for those women who displayed any,

would often come after long periods of time and during interviews with professionals who were preparing them for their respective court trials. Fourth, the women were mainly unhelpful to the police in their investigations and other professionals making it difficult for both investigators and the court to completely understand the circumstances of their crime and motivations.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was an examination of the eight homicides that occurred as a result of planned activity. The findings indicate that the principle motivation was revenge, with the women's actions also fuelled by feelings of anger and jealousy. All of these six homicides motivated by revenge involved the build up of resentment and anger towards their victims for a perceived wrongdoing and/or inappropriate behaviour. In five of these homicides motivated by revenge, both the offenders and victims were involved in criminal activities that formed a framework for the settlement of their disputes. Two cases in these planned murders involved women killing as a result of jealousy. Only one woman was motivated to kill for financial benefit. They provide evidence that women's violence is expressed across a number of diverse circumstances. Although these case studies motivated by revenge, anger and jealousy are typically associated with masculine scenarios of violence, these patterns are evident in other studies concerned to understand why women kill (Brookman, 2005; Chan, 2001; Kirkwood, 2000; Mouzos, 2003; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2003).

In six of these cases women killed with others, with five murders committed with men and one murder involving three women co-offenders. There were two scenarios where women killed on their own. These planned murders are distinguished from the

unplanned murders as they are more likely to include men, multiple weapons are more likely to be used, and the death of the victim is likely to involve their entrapment. When men were involved, the level of violence escalated. Drugs and alcohol were deliberately in seven of the murders to foster the execution of their planned assaults. This included the intoxication of co-offenders to achieve compliance and intoxication of victims to produce least resistance. The use of multiple weapons led to a pattern of overkill and brutality in seven of these eight planned murders.

The level of planning in female homicide is considered rare, and is usually discussed in the context of either serial and multiple murders or unusual cases (Seal, 2010). The level of collaborative behaviour of women with men is also found in other homicide studies, including serial killings (Davis, 2001; Polk, 1994; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). However, in other studies women are described as being entrapped in the emotional abuse and coercive influence of men (Davis, 2001; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Steffensmeir, 2009). In this study, there is no evidence to indicate that men either entrapped the women or dominated and persuaded them to participate in these planned attacks. In contrast, the women were dominant over others and were central participants in the planning and execution of these assaults.

In the final section the aftermath of these planned attacks was examined with are four distinguishing features identified. First, in the preparation for these attacks plans were made to remove evidence or dispose of the victim's body that would implicate the offenders. Second, efforts were put into effect to either lay blame elsewhere or to create an alibi for themselves. Third, only two of the twelve women were recognised by the courts as expressing genuine remorse from the early part of the murder enquiries. Remorse, for the other women who displayed any, would often come after long periods

of time and during interviews with professionals who were preparing them for their respective court trials. Fourth, the women were mainly unhelpful to the police in their investigations and other professionals making it difficult for both investigators and the court to completely understand the circumstances of their crime and motivations..

The behaviour of the twelve women supports the argument that not all women's violence is reactive (Daly, 2008; Kirkwood, 2000; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003). It is clear that the planning and organisation of these crimes means that their actions were intentional. These women, like the young women found in the studies of Miller and Decker (2001), Miller and Mullins (2006) and Daly (2008), willingly planned and resorted to violence to resolve their conflicts and responded with a sense of justification to use violence.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Common to understandings of women's violence is their status as victims. Women's killing is typically believed to be a response to the experiences of a violent relationship, a defensive action, or arising out of their experiences of oppression and unequal status. These constructions of the violent female killer remain important for understanding some homicides, particularly those involving family members. Less is known about the behaviour and motivations of women who kill non-family members. Feminists have been grappling to understand women's violence that is neither self-defensive nor a result of a psychological disturbance (Daly, 2008, 2010; Kruttschnitt, 2013; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Pearson, 1997). Rather than understanding women's violence as embedded in their victimisation, such research highlights their agency and argues that this must be taken into account in explaining their criminal offending. According to Carrington (2013, p. 73), feminist theories need to address the specific contexts in which women use violence. Analysing female offenders' experiences helps to better understand the nature of their violence. My study has generated new knowledge of women's violence, as suggested by Carrington (2013), by exploring scenarios of women who kill non-family.

The study was an analysis of court transcripts of 14 murder cases involving 18 women. All of the women were charged with either murder or manslaughter of a person who was not a family member in Victoria, Australia between 1995 and 2007. My research revealed a group of women who killed violently with or without provocation. This research deepens our understandings of the breadth of this violent behavior among women who kill non-family. The analysis entailed an investigation of the women's

motives and social and economic circumstances, the specific scenarios in which they killed, and the aftermath of the death. In analysing the data, two major patterns of homicides were identified: unplanned and planned, with scenarios of spontaneous confrontation associated with unplanned murders and those of revenge with planned murders.

This chapter discusses the key findings of the research, first, in terms of the background circumstances of the lives of the women, and second, in terms of the motivations and characteristics of unplanned and planned murders. Drawing together these two themes there is further discussion on what this means for our increased understandings of women who kill non-family.

Background circumstances of the women who killed non-family

Forms of disadvantage, including living on a low income, drug and alcohol use, mental ill health and experiences of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse have been identified for some of the women. However, the analysis demonstrated that others did not experience these disadvantages.

Economic circumstances

To some extent the findings of this thesis concur with other studies that report that women who kill are vulnerable economically (Kirkwood, 2000; Mann, 1996, Mouzos, 2003). However, a third of the women were in stable employment at the time of the murders and others had had periods of employment in the past. In addition, at least four of the women had experienced financially comfortable upbringing. These

contrasting findings suggest a greater level of diversity in the economic circumstances of women who kill non-family than suggested in previous research. When considering the two groups of women who committed planned and unplanned murders, there is no obvious link between the economic circumstances of the women and the type of murder committed.

Experiences of sexual assault

Of the total of 18 women, there were three women offenders who were victims of sexual assault by family members and strangers as children. Like many childhood victims of sexual assault they were vulnerable to other experiences of sexual assault as adolescents and adults (Kendall & Funk, 2003, p. 97). The court records indicate that these women's experiences of sexual assault unfolded into a series of other traumatic life events, including mental ill health, misuse of alcohol and drugs, and entry into prostitution. Their childhood experiences also predisposed them to further abusive relationships. According to the court evidence, another three women first experienced sexual assault in adolescence or adulthood. However, the courts while sympathetic to these background experiences of sexual violence, did not deem them to be relevant factors in assessing the women's culpability for their criminal actions.

For all of the women for whom we have evidence of sexual assault, the risk of further violence intensified as their life circumstances continued to produce vulnerability. Their friendships and relationships forged in the context of prostitution, drug addiction and homelessness were tenuous and placed them at risk of further abuse. The women identified as having experienced sexual assault in the family appear to fall into scenarios found in Daly's (1994) and Simpson et al.'s (2008) studies of young women involved in

criminal offending, who leave home early due to issues of abuse and are drawn into a deviant milieu in which they etch out a living from prostitution, become affected by drug use, and engage in criminal activity.

When considering the planned and unplanned murders, there is no obvious link between the women's experiences of sexual assault and the type of murder committed. It is worth noting, though, that two unplanned murders occurred in the context of what their defence described as unwanted sexual advances.

Mental ill health

There were a total of nine women in this study diagnosed with histories of psychiatric disorders. These were not factors considered by the court as playing a major role in the execution of the murders. Five of these women were involved in planned and four in unplanned attacks. The types of mental ill health experienced by the women fell into the categories of bipolar affective disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, mood disorder, psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder. These diagnoses occurred in their childhood, adolescence or were identified as part of their assessment for court purposes. Here, there was a notable difference in relation to mental health status between the women who committed unplanned murders and those who were part of planned attacks.

There were two female offenders in unplanned attacks who were experiencing delusions and hallucinations prior to the killing of their victims. These two were the only women in this study where there was clear evidence of how their respective mental disorders were posed in court as a potential mitigating factor in the killing of their

victims. However, while the court acknowledged their respective mental illnesses, the defence of mental impairment was not available in either case.

These cases appear to be consistent with homicide research which suggests that very few offenders kill as a result of a clinically diagnosed illness or psychiatric history (Brookman, 2005; Kirkwood, 2000; Wallace, 1986). There was an absence of information about mental health for eight of the women, and the other was identified as having no past history of mental ill health.

The use of alcohol and drugs

The findings of this thesis indicate that alcohol and drugs strongly permeated most of the women's lives. Drugs and alcohol were a major feature of most of the murders, both planned and unplanned. Indeed, one of the planned murders occurred in the context of criminal drug trade activities. For some of the women, serious drug use commenced during childhood or adolescence, with two women introduced to drugs as children by their parents. For most of the women, experiences of drug dependence resulted in crime related activity. These activities served to further fund their addictions.

Access to and use of drugs and alcohol were connected to the women's past and current experiences of trauma and violence, including sexual assault. For some women, adverse family circumstances or living in or leaving a violent relationship were predictors of their continued addiction to drugs. When using drugs they were vulnerable to relationships that were violent. These would in turn escalate their drug use and, consistent with other research, bring them into a violent social milieu (Kirkwood, 2002; Maher, 1997; Miller, 2004). The women's use of drugs was also linked to their

involvement in other criminal activities and patterns of behaviour in which the women were purposefully negotiating actions that were to lead to the deaths of their victims.

Family support

There was diversity in the nature of the relationships that the women had with their families. While there is limited data on childhood family relationships, it is clear that some families were supportive and others not during this early period of the women's life. The court records indicate that three women grew up in harmful family environments that included experiences of sexual abuse and drug use. Three women had the support of their family during childhood and adolescence and these women were reported as having been raised in stable family backgrounds. For the remaining eleven women, there was insufficient data to judge the level of family support during childhood.

In adolescence and adulthood, there was evidence to suggest that three women had no family support. These were the same women who had harmful family experiences during childhood. There were a total of ten women who had the support of some family members at the time of the murder and during the subsequent court cases. Among this group of ten women, four committed unplanned murders and six took part in planned murders. This included women who committed the most brutal murders. An unexpected finding of this study is that more than half of the sample had family support at the time of the murders and during their subsequent court cases. It would appear, then, that to some extent these women were embedded in loving families.

Unplanned and planned murders

In analysing the data two major patterns of homicides were identified: of the 14 murders, six were unplanned and eight planned. Scenarios of spontaneous confrontation were associated with unplanned murders, and those of revenge with planned murders.

Unplanned murders

A range of emotional responses, including rage, anger, frustration and a perceived need to self-protect, shaped the motives of the women involved in unplanned murders. The women also consciously used violence to solve perceived conflicts or confrontations with their victims. Their expressions of violence were driven to leverage control in their disagreements with the victims and a desire to maintain or defend their sense of honour. They were also motivated to rectify what they saw as displays of disrespect from their victims. Five women felt victimised by their victims, believing they were provoked by either insults or arguments and, in two cases, the unwanted sexual advances of their victims. A distinctive feature of these unplanned homicides is that the challenge from the victim has led to the offender fetching a weapon and resorting to violence to resolve the conflict. One murder resulted from a random killing of a female not known to the offenders and the motivations of the female offender were linked to her being under the control and influence of her partner.

While each homicide is unique and comprised the impact of multiple factors there are also similar characteristics. Five women were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their offences. Five victims were stabbed to death, with two

victims killed from a single stab wound and three victims killed as a result of multiple stabbings. One victim died from strangulation, physical force and injuries sustained from a sharp object with another victim stabbed and subjected to a ligature placed around her neck and being terrorised by a machete. Such use of physical and assaultive force is also evidenced in research on young women involved in gangs and criminal activity (Daly, 2010, Miller & Decker, 2001, Miller, 2004; Miller & Mullins, 2008). In four of the unplanned murders the victims died a violent death, with one of these victims being killed violently by the partner of the female offender. Brutality was key characteristic in these four violent murders, suggesting that the women offenders intended to cause serious hurt and injury to their victims.

Five of the unplanned assaults involved women acting on their own; only one offender was involved with another. This finding is not consistent with other homicide research, as women are typically found to kill in concert with others (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2008; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994).

In the aftermath of these unplanned homicides, only two women showed genuine remorse for their actions. The other four women demonstrated no respect to their victim's bodies, failed to seek assistance for the victim and attempted to remove all evidence of their involvement in these violent killings.

Planned murders

In planned murders the primary motives were revenge, anger and jealousy. Eight women were predominately motivated by revenge and anger for a perceived wrongdoing, two women were motivated by jealousy, one woman was motivated by

jealousy and revenge, and one woman was motivated by financial greed. All of the offenders sought retaliatory action to obtain some form of justice to avenge what they believed to be their losses.

In contrast to the unplanned attacks in which the women felt victimised by their victims, in the planned scenarios the offenders were more likely to take revenge for the behaviours of their victims. Unlike those scenarios of confrontational homicide, where the women responded spontaneously with reactive violence, the women in planned attacks used their anger to plan revenge against their victims. However, the women motivated by revenge also sought to leverage control in their disagreements with their victim and like women in the unplanned attacks, did not want to be seen as someone who could be pushed around or disrespected. In five of these homicides motivated by revenge, both the offenders and victims were involved in criminal activities that formed a framework for the settlement of their disputes. Two cases in these planned murders involved women killing as a result of jealousy. One case involved the killing of a sexual rival with the other offender motivated by her jealousy of the deceased's attributes.

There are six distinguishing characteristics of these planned murders that set them apart from those murders that were unplanned. Planned murders were more likely to include men, multiple weapons were more likely to be used, the death of the victim was likely to involve their entrapment, alcohol and drugs were used to strategise the execution of the assaults, including reducing the resistance of the victim, in the aftermath of each murder it was more likely for the body to be disposed of or hidden, and the women offenders were less likely to display remorse for their actions. In each case, careful attention went into the planning of the attack. This level of planning in

female homicide is considered rare, and is usually discussed in the context of either serial and multiple murders or unusual cases (Morrissey, 2003; Seal, 2010).

Of the eight planned murders, six were committed by women acting in concert with other co-offenders. Two murders were committed by a sole female offender. This is in contrast to the unplanned murders in which all, with the exception of one, were committed by a sole offender. This finding of women killing with others is consistent with other research (Kirkwood, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 2008; Mann, 1996; Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). The cases under review indicate that when women kill with co-offenders they are likely to do so in planned attacks, and more likely to kill with men. However, one murder involved women only; there were three women co-offenders in this planned assault.

In homicide studies where women are known to kill with men, women are described as being under the coercive influence of the male, and are either peripheral or passive in these scenarios (Mouzos, 2003; Polk, 1994). In contrast, in this study, there is no evidence to indicate that men either entrapped women or dominated and coerced them to participate in these planned attacks. Indeed, the women were dominant over others and were central participants in the planning and execution of the assaults. All female offenders were willing initiators of the violence, active in the confrontation, and capable of excessive violence and instilling fear. The women acted as co-conspirators and collaborators, contributing significantly to planning efforts including the entrapment and luring of the victim and execution of the murder. In all of the murders involving men the level of violence was excessive.

In seven of these eight planned attacks the victims were killed by a variety of methods and a range of weapons. The methods of killing involved beatings, stabbings, strangulation, gunshots and the use of physical force to subdue their victims. This use of multiple methods and weapons led to a pattern of overkill. Their selection and use of multiple weapons provides evidence of their intent to seriously hurt their victims. The offender's use of weapons is also distinguished from the unplanned assaults, in that knives were the primary weapons used to kill victims in these scenarios, whereas multiple weapons were used to kill the victims in planned assaults. Although these women involved in planned attacks also stabbed their victims, they were more likely to use assaultive force with a range of weapons and to engage in physical assaults to kill their victims.

A distinguishing feature of all of these eight planned murders is the brutality and use of excessive violence to kill each victim. Eleven of the twelve women in the eight planned assaults have responded to grievances in ways that are typical of masculine scenarios of violence, in that they willfully used violence to resolve conflict (Polk, 1994; Pease, 1997; Wallace, 1986). The use of substances and alcohol was significant in those murders in which the victim was brutally stabbed multiple times and beaten to death.

There are five distinguishing features that occurred in the aftermath of the planned attacks. First, in the preparation for these attacks plans were made to remove evidence and/or dispose of the victim's body. Second, efforts were put into effect to either lay blame elsewhere or to create an alibi for themselves. Third, only two of the twelve women were recognised as expressing genuine remorse for their role in murdering the victim. Fourth, two women were unhelpful to the police in their investigations and to

other professionals, making it difficult for both investigators and the court to completely understand the circumstances of their crime and motivations.

The behaviour of these twelve women supports the argument that not all women's violence is reactive (Daly, 2008; Kirkwood, 2000; Morrissey, 2003, 2006; Mouzos, 2003). The planning and organisation of the crimes make it possible to consider their actions as intentional. These women operated within a social milieu that condoned the use of violence. This pattern of using violence to resolve disputes is also evidenced in studies of young women involved in gangs (Miller & Decker, 2001; Miller, 2004; Daly, 2010).

Final comments

This study supports the work of other feminists who seek a more nuanced explanation of female agency in understanding women who kill. In a range of ways this research makes original contributions and expands our knowledge of the nature of women's killing of non-family and the background and circumstances of these women who killed. This new knowledge also supports revised understandings of the tension between women's victimisation and their role of offenders. While some of these women could be considered disadvantaged with difficult life histories of economic vulnerability, mental ill health, drug and alcohol use, and sexual violence, there is also evidence among the group that there is diversity and some women were not so affected. Moreover, among the group who experienced the most disadvantages, their agency can readily be considered a factor when explaining their violence. In contrast to female homicide involving family members the crimes of these women who have killed non-family cannot be explained as arising out of their victimisation.

The women's responses to the conflicts with their victims, according to court evidence, can be linked to their desire to regain control over their circumstances. These women were willfully aggressive in achieving this goal and, while their objective may have not been to kill, they intended to cause serious harm and injury to their victims. Among the group of 18 women, 12 actively planned to seriously hurt their victims. These women believed their victims deserved to be hurt and willingly resorted to the use of physical violence.

In other research, where women have killed with a male co-offender, typically women have been in his thrall. In one of the unplanned murders reviewed in this study this was the case but in the other planned murders, women were central to the planning and execution of the killing and were not intimidated by the men involved. Also significant is the level of brutality undertaken by many of the women studied in this research. Moreover, in the aftermath of their crimes only four of the women across both unplanned and planned homicides were recognised by the court as demonstrating remorse for their victims. Each of these women, in both unplanned and planned attacks, rejected other actions that may have avoided the death of their victims.

In considering these women we have to give attention to the conditions that have criminalised their behaviour, but we must also not reduce their stories of violence to a discourse of victimisation and disadvantage. This thesis has shown that feminist explanations of women's victimisation and women's agency are both important in understanding women's violence. The findings support the work of other feminists who have sought more subtle explanations of the roles of victimisation and agency in understanding women who kill. It confirms that both are important and highlights that neither can adequately explain women's lethal violence. The research makes a

contribution to theorising about women's violence by having generated knowledge about the specific contexts in which women use lethal violence against friends, acquaintances and strangers.

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