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## The Social and Cultural Geography 2012 Plenary:

### Seismologies of emotion:

#### Fear and activism during domestic violence

Rachel Pain

*This paper explores the relation of fear to activism in private and constrained circumstances of chronic risk and anxiety. Asking how people contest domestic violence, given the intensity of the fear that it generates, the paper reframes their responses as practices of activism. It draws on qualitative research that charts the nature, experience and effects of fear over time. Using seismology as a metaphor for this process, the analysis describes complex and often hidden shifts in emotions over periods of years, as interviewees describe being simultaneously constrained by fear and actively using fear to manage and contest violence. Their practices of resistance are small scale, largely invisible to others, and have a messy and non-linear relationship with the process of leaving that some eventually undertake. Such action is only necessary in a social and political climate which continues to place more emphasis on individual than social responsibility for domestic violence. I examine what this resistance adds to recent accounts of activism, concluding that isolated actions constitute activism when they anticipate or engender collective social and political change at other scales.*

**Keywords:** domestic violence, activism, emotion, fear, politics, social change,

## Introduction

This paper explores the relation of fear to activism in circumstances of chronic risk, terror and anxiety. The two experiences of feeling fear and taking action to improve a dangerous situation might seem like opposites. Fear has been a popular object of study in research on violence, whether fear of crime (e.g. Sandberg and Rönnblom 2013; Pain 2000) or fear in the war on/of terror (Gregory and Pred 2007; Robin 2004). But despite its ubiquity, fear is still largely discussed as a monolithic force that acts to disempower. In recent work on the politics of terrorism in particular, fear is a loosely deployed term, disembodied and dislocated from the people and places where it is supposedly felt, with little agency attributed to its subjects (Pain 2009). Despite the importance of fear in diverse forms of social and political oppression, its complexity and workings are rarely explored. In research on emotions and activism, in contrast, there has been much closer examination of the ways emotions work to *counter* oppressive practices at specific sites and times (Askins 2011; Brown and Pickerill 2009; Chatterton 2006; Routledge 2010; Wright 2008). In these literatures, emotions are predominantly considered to be a positive force that adds momentum to the push for social change (Horton and Kraftl 2009), with most attention on the collective nature of struggle: the ways in which shared feelings and affects mobilise politics in different spaces (Brown and Pickerill 2009; Lee 2012).

In this paper, I explore these issues in particularly risky and constrained circumstances where those involved have rarely been viewed as activists. Domestic violence has seen less attention in geographical research than other forms of violence (though see Brickell 2008; Meth 2003; Pain forthcoming; Warrington 2001). The longstanding feminist assertion that domestic violence is a form of political oppression (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Hammer 2002) is the starting point for the analysis here. Rates remain high in every country, and evidence grows that state responses developed in the late twentieth century have been only marginally effective (Phillips 2008; Walklate 2008). Domestic violence can also be understood as closely connected to other hegemonic forms of violence and militarism (Eisenstein 2007; INCITE! 2006; Moser 2001), and I have argued that, as violence that attempts political influence or control through instilling fear, it works as a form of terrorism (Pain forthcoming).

Here, drawing on interviewees' accounts of domestic violence, I explore their practices of resistance, suggesting that these constitute activism. The location of domestic violence in the private sphere and in intimate relationships which often enable some degree of spatial entrapment, as well as the cultural meanings of domestic violence in wider society, mean that this activism has a particular nature. It is largely undertaken alone, and in circumstances that are not only disempowering but that present immediate and continued physical and emotional danger, both to the person being abused and to others, especially children. There are rarely social relations of affinity or solidarity present which support and circulate other, more collective, activisms (for example, see Routledge 2010). The argument here builds on recent reconceptualisation of who and what an activist is. While traditional framings define activism and activists in masculinist terms, longstanding feminist analyses and geographical work have identified the small acts and 'quiet politics' of activism as significant (Askins 2013; e.g. Abrahams 1992; Martin et al 2007; Staeheli 2012; Staeheli and Cope 1994). This work provides the foundation for understanding activism during domestic violence as part of a slow, difficult struggle against hegemony that is messy and rarely complete. The contestation of any linear notion of recovery and its subjects also informs the arguments here (Tamas 2011). To be understood as activism, personal struggle must connect with political and social change, and this problematic is grappled with towards the end of the paper.

The question that drives the paper is how do people who are abused contest violence, given the intensity and power of fear in domestic violence? To answer this involves closer examination of the experience of fear. The paper maps out the texture and pattern of fear, situating it over the lifecourse of a violent relationship, and understanding it through what I term seismologies of emotion. This metaphor comes from the study of earthquakes, where major events are only the visible manifestation of long term, much smaller movements of the earth's crust that both build up to and succeed spectacular events. As I go on to argue, this framing helps to understand fear in domestic violence: as a chronic, shifting, largely silent state that occasionally culminates in changes that become visible to a wider public. At different times, opportunities for activism may be forged, taken or passed up. In the space of the home, both resistance and activism take particular forms.

Any romanticised notions of 'rising above fear' or implication of responsibility for doing so on the part of people suffering domestic violence are dismissed when we look at the specific

situation of fear in relationships where an intimate partner uses violence. A deep and persisting aspect of societal attitudes to domestic violence has been the construction of those being abused as passive victims who are in some ways responsible for abuse, either through their behaviour or for failing to challenge or leave abusers (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Enadner and Holmberg 2008; INCITE! 2006; Wilson 1983). Feminists, in contrast, have argued that abused people are active in resisting abuse. While knowledge is growing about the dynamics of abusive relationships, both from the perspective of abuser and abused (see Hennessey 2012; Stark 2007; Williamson 2010), it is still the case that:

We need both analyses of how men use violence to control women and analyses of how women have managed to exert power in extreme situations. This is all the more impressive because this exertion of power, resistance and agency emanates from such disadvantaged positions (Hammer, 2002: 124).

Domestic violence, fear and activism are all shaped by gender, race, ethnicity, class and heterosexism. Mainstream accounts of fear have been critiqued for their masculinism and whiteness, both in literatures on geopolitics (Pain 2009) and activism (Askins 2011). From the outset, while I go on to draw examples from both women and men who have experienced abuse, it is important to state that domestic violence is a gendered phenomenon, in its incidence and prevalence but also its social and political dynamics. For visible minority groups, these politics and activism take on a particular shape, as the experience of domestic violence intersects with racist discrimination and violence which, in a majority white society, can deter those being abused by an intimate partner from disclosing abuse or leaving (Crenshaw 1991; INCITE! 2006). For people in same sex relationships, it can also be harder to contest abuse by seeking external help, and income has a significant effect as social and economic capital can help in some ways to counter abuse and its aftermath (see Pain and Scottish Womens Aid 2012).

After a description of the research methodology, the first section of the paper examines the texture of experiences of fear. The second explores how people experiencing domestic violence act to cope with or change the situation. To do this, it examines what happens to emotions over a period of time, making sense of this process by using seismology as a metaphor. In the final section, I consider the case that these actions constitute activism.

## **Methodology**

The data are drawn from a study of the role of fear in domestic violence conducted in 2012 in collaboration with Scottish Womens Aid (Pain and Scottish Womens Aid 2012). I conducted 18 in-depth qualitative interviews with 16 survivors of domestic abuse, who documented experiences of abuse in 18 intimate relationships. They were recruited through organisations that provide services to people experiencing domestic abuse and through personal contacts in Scotland and north east England. The sample included 14 women and 2 men. One woman and one man talked about same-sex relationships. Interviewees ranged in age from 25 to 65, and came from varied social class backgrounds. 13 interviewees were from white ethnic backgrounds, and three had ethnic minority backgrounds and had migrated to Scotland as adults. All but three of those interviewed had young children at the time of the abuse.

The interviews lasted between one and three hours. They were lightly structured and in-depth, aiming for a balance between my questions and the interviewees' preferences in telling their stories, and allowing new themes to emerge. Interviews were transcribed and subject to standard qualitative analysis procedures. Names and places mentioned were changed to preserve anonymity, and interviewees were offered the option of choosing a pseudonym for themselves. Three of the women interviewed also gave written accounts of their experiences for use in the research.

There is a balance to be struck between the risks of replaying and reigniting trauma, and the need to speak about violence, and this applies to research as well as other media. Interviewing people who have experienced long term violence raises specific ethical and methodological issues (Ellsberg and Heise 2005; Meth 2003). I used a feminist methodology, which I understand as enabling those in marginalised positions to be heard to the extent that they choose, being reflexive about the effects of power and ethics in the research, safeguarding the emotional and physical wellbeing of the researched and the researcher, and pursuing politically active research that has a purpose beyond knowledge production (Skinner et al 2005).

To help me in the attempt to underpin these ethics, I applied elements of psychotherapeutic practice to interviewing. As Bondi (1999, 2013) has shown, psychotherapy has a number of insights for qualitative research practice. While I have interviewed many people who have experienced violence over the years, I trained in counselling skills before beginning this research, and then worked with a counsellor throughout the research period for both supervision and therapy. There are two reasons for this approach. First, counselling techniques help in learning how to listen, and to encourage participants to talk in different ways about emotions, which can be hard to express in everyday language and conversation.

Second, counselling techniques are founded on principles for interaction, such as empathy and congruence, that aim to foster care and minimise harm to participants and the counsellor (or, in this case, the interviewer); for example, being yourself, only being there for the other person, and dealing with your own issues so they don't intervene. While participants were keen to tell their stories, and many were calm, articulate and fluent, most were tearful at times, and there were moments that were especially emotional. High rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) exist among people who have experienced domestic violence, and memories can trigger trauma years later (Herman 1992; Humphreys and Joseph, 2004). As interviewers it is important that we recognise this in situ, probing not only carefully but in a way that allows the interviewee to control how far they delve. In one interview, for example, the interviewee found it difficult even to begin to speak. In another, the interviewee insisted on continuing, although she was shaking intensely throughout. While some said that the interview functioned as a small step in their own recovery, for researchers to assume that interviewing is therapeutic is a romantic and risky view of the encounter. Instead, I approached interviews as co-constructed and managed interactions for a particular end – in this case, the motivation for interviewees was overwhelmingly to tell their stories and contribute to research that they hoped might make a difference for others. We should also remain aware that, as Bondi (2013) reminds us, both psychotherapy and qualitative research are processes of narration and making meaning, and produce incomplete and partial knowledges.

Another important aspect of ensuring care for others is protecting ourselves as researchers. This involves being clear about the emotional dynamics that might influence the conduct and analysis of the research from our own perspectives and lives. I experienced domestic violence

over a period of years. Again, informed by a key principle of psychotherapeutic practice, ensuring that my own experiences did not affect interactions with interviewees adversely was another reason for working with a counsellor during this period. The training prepared me with strategies by which I could remain present for interviewees when they recounted traumatic events that triggered my own memories. As the research progressed, I discussed these specific issues with the counsellor before continuing with the research. As many have argued, the personal, emotional and intellectual work of research are not separable (Askins 2008; Bondi 2005; Moss 2001; Pain 2009; Tamas 2009), and these and other writers fold their own lives and experiences into their work in different ways (see in particular Sophie Tamas' (2009, 2011) autobiographical account of domestic violence). I would suggest that conscious and critical reflection on our personal experiences – whether we choose to share these publicly or not - enables more rigorous and richer analysis of our research participants' accounts and the wider story to be told.

## **The feeling of fear**

### *Terror: fear in the moment*

Jennifer: With him he would just blow, right, and it could be out of the blue, the first thing is shock, you know, and it's like it's a physical shock, I mean it's like you know you are walking down the street and you see someone hit by a bus or you know something terrible happens. It's like you stand there and you can't believe, you cannot believe that this is happening.

Meghan: He had his hands round my neck there and he just basically he was punching me about, and then he sort of got up off of me, and he was like "are you afraid?" and I was like I thought "what the hell do I say?"...but I mean I was, I just was physically shaking because you just dinnae ken what's going to happen next.

Candy: I would actually physically start shaking or stutter because I was trying to say something to him...and he would laugh about that, he would be like you know "what are you shaking at?" and then just start laughing, and then because he saw that side he knew that anything he did would just frighten me.

Kate: The feelings you know I remember when he was sort of screaming at me and we were in the middle of one of these scenes which were so horrifying, he would you know I would have these, I would feel the cascade of hormones you know, this kind of heat it was hot or cold or something but I could just feel it moving through me you know as your body kind of tries to cope... it's such a sort of intensity of stress hormones and I remember just thinking this is so toxic for my body and then I was pregnant of course too...the sort of physical sensation of anger and fear and distress and how intense that was.

The 16 interviewees had experienced various combinations of physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse. However, almost all had suffered physical violence as part of this, towards themselves, their property and possession, and sometimes their children and pets. Sometimes this was frequent, and sometimes occasional. But interviewees often described it as 'not the worst part' of the abuse in comparison to less visible aspects of emotional and psychological control (Williamson 2010). Above, Jennifer, Meghan, Candy and Kate describe affective reactions to violence in the moment it occurs. Incidents of physical violence create high levels of intense fear and trauma. At these moments, fear is experienced as an embodied state – the shaking, stuttering, and waves of stress and panic described by the women above. In some ways, domestic violence is routine, for example compared with an assault by a stranger on the street, yet incidents of violence are always accompanied by a feeling of shock, and often experienced as coming 'out of the blue' (as Jennifer describes). The feelings provoked were not something that interviewees got used to - the fear and trauma that they talked about continued, and often intensified, over months or years.

These and other interviewees described how they rapidly began to think and plan. Fear in the moment of violence is a bodily experience, but quickly becomes a cognitive problem at the same time: panic has to be suppressed, as the mind is working fast to try to plan how to halt or minimise the damage of the incident. All of the interviewees describe this mix of physical and psychological reactions during moments of violence.

*Chronic fear: "Treading on eggshells"*

Ellie: When he came home from his work I was treading on eggshells and everything ... I felt terrible, I felt sick every time he came in from his work...is he going to be pleased or is he going to come in in a bad mood? Am I going to get battered the night again or, everything's just going through your mind and your stomach goes absolutely, you feel sick.

Kate: Being exposed intimately to a crazy person is very scary...I was always on eggshells. I mean I remember thinking this was like living in a house where, you know, say I'm walking around a room and there are particular points on the floor where I'm going to get an electric shock, and I never could know where those spots were.

Emma: It feels like everything goes out of control and you're trying to pull everything back into, you know, like all these wee eggs into this one wee basket to try and keep it in tight so that it doesn't fly off the handle again, do you know what I mean? So you're constantly on edge. So I'm not eating properly...and that's how I lived.

Margie: It would come out of nowhere you know I'd be... like a spring coiled up, that's how I felt the whole time in the chest because I didn't know when something like this was going to happen... It was a tightness the whole time inside my chest. I was never relaxed, I was always tense that something could happen.

Candy: It's just to feel that fear before someone comes in, and then you know be really on edge the whole time that he's actually around until the time that he's fast asleep in bed, it's just I don't know how to describe it, it's really it's just it's horrible, you've got a knot in your stomach the whole time and you just you know you're like "oh my God is this going to make him go or is this going to make him go?"

Petunia: I ended up with stomach ulcers because I was internalising all of this... like I noticed if somebody tapped me on the shoulder, I practically just, I didn't realise I was on fight or flight all the time, I couldn't just unwind.

Over time, domestic violence creates an emotional and psychological state quite unique amongst crimes: chronic fear. All but one of those interviewed suffered abuse for years. The women above talk about their feelings of fear in between incidents of physical violence which may be days, weeks or months apart. As time goes on, in every case this chronic fear

escalated, as they came to inhabit an almost constant dread of abuse and developed detailed precautions to try to improve their security. This stress has physical manifestations that differ to those experienced in the moment of physical violence. Several interviewees used the metaphor of 'treading on eggshells' to describe this state, while Margie likens the feeling of chronic anxiety to a coiled spring; a lot of anxious effort is spent trying to predict what might trigger abusive behaviour and taking action to try and reduce its likelihood. As is well documented, this state of chronic fear and associated stress causes long term damage to physical and mental health (Herman 1997; Scottish Womens Aid 2010b, 2010c). Interviewees reported a range of symptoms while experiencing abuse including anxiety, depression, sleep and eating disorders, low self esteem, self-harming and thoughts of suicide.

Judith Herman's (1997) classic account of trauma links the experiences of survivors of violent atrocities including torture, concentration camps and domestic violence. She argues that complex trauma arises from a setting from which escape is difficult, and a perpetrator who may appear 'normal'. It is no surprise then, that fear has a distinct texture in this setting; it is both immediate and long term, intimate and embedded within social relations, continuous (there is no easy escape or withdrawal from the source of harm) and compounded by spatial entrapment and abusers' powerful justifications of their violence. Much evidence suggests that fear folds into certain psychological effects that are now recognised as created by domestic violence (Herman 1997; Hennessey 2011; Stark 2007).

#### *Doublethink: the psychology of abuse*

Rachel: What did you tell yourself when you asked yourself "why is this happening", what was your answer at first?

Ellie: I hadn't got an answer, I kept saying "why is it happening to me, why does it always happen to me?" I'm going "what am I doing wrong?"

Rachel: Did you always feel that she was responsible for her behaviour, or did you ever start to wonder well is it something about me?

Stephen: Oh constantly, oh constantly...for years I would be "what am I doing wrong? I must be doing something wrong" you know. Oh absolutely I would you know sort of

agonise about that saying “I must be doing something that’s you know getting under her skin”.

Petunia: I almost couldn’t believe it was happening... I felt there must be a way I could stop it... I seemed to think it must be me as well, there’s something I’m doing wrong and there must be a way I can explain to her and make her believe me.

Kate: It made me feel like I was kind of going a bit crazy...this constant double standard...And it really made me feel like I was living in a sort of, I don’t know, some kind of distorted world... “am I missing something here?” you know, because he would say “well I don’t know what you are talking about...I’m a very reasonable person” and you know, it just sort of has some bizarre power when somebody says that....Part of me was trying at times all these sort of intellectual gymnastics to try to see things, see it from his point of view and try to sort of say “well maybe there’s some way I can look at this that makes it you know less reprehensible”. So we rationalise it in all sorts of ways don’t we, we try to, but I did know that it was wrong obviously that what he was doing was really wrong. I mean I had a lot of self-doubt but I also know that he was crazy.

The psychological reactions that these interviewees describe were present for all interviewees. They may seem extreme to those who have not experienced this form of abuse. How a relationship that routinely invokes fear of harm can change the way that we think (and as Hennessey (2011) shows, these are real changes, rather than the responses of individuals somehow preconditioned to self-blame), underlines the earlier point that physical violence is not the only or main means of control in domestic abuse. As Williamson (2010: 1412-1422) puts it, ‘it is those abuses that cannot be seen that are most difficult to deal with...the perpetrator is guilty of a crime against identity and liberty’. Mindgames and blame-laying are a common part of domestic violence. Prolonged abuse leads to specific forms of fear and trauma and ‘invades and erodes the personality’ (Herman, 1997: 86); for interviewees, fear was often compounded by psychological changes including internalisation, depression and self-hatred.

Abusers commonly either refuse to talk about abuse or, as time goes on, put the blame at the feet of the person suffering it (Jones 2004; Stark 2007). As a way of rationalising and coping

with abuse, many interviewees report that they came to hold contradictory thoughts or beliefs in their heads at once. On the one hand, they knew that the abuse was wrong; and on the other hand, they either tried to ignore this thought and make things work, or partly or fully believed the abuser's justification of the abuse (see Ellie, Stephen, Petunia and Kate, above). Chronic fear for one's own and one's children's safety is a powerful force that reinforces this tendency to 'doublethink' (Herman 1997). This is a survival strategy, a way of dealing with stress and the demands of everyday life; the effort of trying to avoid or manage abuse, running a home and family, keeping things 'normal' for the children, and quite often hiding abuse from others. The dynamic is strongly affected by whether the person being abused has told people outside the relationship about the abuse, and what their reactions are (Barrett and St Pierre 2011), but very few interviewees told anyone about the abuse for the first few years. When an intimate partner states that their behaviour is not abusive, it is common for people to question whether they are in fact really victims of domestic violence: what is being experienced has no public recognition or audience (Williamson 2010). As Stark (2007: 334) has argued, understanding these psychological dynamics should not take emphasis or blame away from perpetrators' actions; they show that 'the persistence of the controlling partner better explains the durability of abusive relationships than a victim's inclination to stay or her ambivalence.'

### **Seismologies of emotion**

So far, I have shown that fear of domestic violence is particular and intense, and profoundly shaped by its situation in an intimate relationship where psychological as well as physical control is exerted. This is compounded by its setting in domestic space, from which escape is made complex by a range of cultural and economic obligations and ties. This presents a key problematic: in such extreme, constrained and emotionally charged circumstances, how are people able to counter violence in the home? It is difficult to read potential for resistance from interviewees' descriptions of their feelings, above, where they speak of terror, entrapment and self doubt. Only through analysis of what fear feels like and does over the longer term do we begin to see possibilities opening up.

As I have suggested elsewhere, 'fear' is often used in academic analysis in a way that is vague and sweeping, attributed variously to populations and governance without specification of the bodies, minds and places it inhabits; people's agency, and the ways in which fear is entangled with other emotions, are frequently overlooked (Pain 2009; Pain et al 2010). Yet we know from other contexts that fear is both variegated and specific: it works in different ways in different places (Pain 2000). Any monolithic conception of fear that positions it only as a negative and disempowering emotional force does not fit with what happens in everyday life (Pain and Smith 2008). Just as people are as likely to resist fear of public space crime as to feel constrained by it in particular circumstances (Koskela 1997), people who are abused by intimate partners resist, and some are eventually able to leave. What we have relatively little understanding of is *how* fear works, its dynamism as well as its grip, its resistance as well as its deployment.

The interviews explored the work that fear does over the lifecourse of abusive relationships, and the role fear has in changing the situation. While the histories of abuse described in the 18 interviews were all different, a broad pattern emerges in this regard, captured by the idea of seismology. Seismology focuses on waves that move through the earth's crust that vary in size, force and effect. Here I use seismic processes as a metaphor for how emotions shift over time in domestic violence. This section describes the emotional changes that took place for the interviewees while they were experiencing abuse, and the actions they took. It highlights resistance, not just among those who manage to leave an abusive situation, but among those who remain. The analysis is arranged so that the seismologies have an apparent chronological order - tremor, build-up, quake, aftershock - but in reality these are not separate stages, and they may overlap, reverse, and repeat.

### *Tremors: managing and resisting domestic violence*

Meghan: I says I really need to get out, I says I need some fresh air and he says "well" he says "the only way you'll get out of here" he says "if I have some assurances that you're coming back".... So he opened the door and I was like "oh my God", I couldnae walk, my legs were just jelly and shaking ken inside uncontrollably, but I thought "no I cannae let him see that I'm like that, I have to get away from here".

Jennifer: There's this sort of rational part of your head that starts doing a commentary on the situation you know, and one of the immediate things for me is "where are the children?", right so and if the children are in the same room then I need to get Philip out of that room, I have to do whatever I can to get him out of the room and away from the children, and you know if the children are downstairs then I need to get Philip into the bedroom and I need to really work on quietening him down, and then I also I need to go downstairs, I need to reassure the children.

Kim: He wouldn't let me leave, but then because I was trying all these things I felt, I felt how do you say when you are trying your best, it's not power, it's not about power it's about

Rachel: Determination?

Kim: Yes determined, I was determined, not because I loved him or anything, just because I didn't have another option so

Rachel: You were really trying to find a solution

Kim: A solution of the problem.

Margie: Having to be strong on one side and try and pretend there's nothing wrong, and being controlled and manipulated at the same time, try to be strong for the kids.

Up to this point, I have discussed the pattern and texture of fear that is created by domestic violence. However, the interviewees (Kim and Margie, above, and many others) spoke as much about strength and courage, and the complex ways in which these are not only balanced alongside, but part of, the feeling of fear. Fear and courage are not separate emotional states (Koskela, 1997; Panelli *et al.*, 2005), and interviewees describe them co-existing, the balance between them shifting, receding and recovering as time goes on.

Here I turn to the issue of resistance: actions taken to counter or reduce violence. All of the interviewees contested the abuse they experienced. While earlier feminist research argued that women are not passive victims (Dobash and Dobash 1992), the assumption that those suffering domestic violence are inactive is persistently strong in both wider society and in academic research (Cavanagh 2003). Resistance to domestic violence, often under extremely constrained circumstances, involves many different strategies (Enadner and Holmberg 2008;

Zosky 2011). A few fight back physically (Hester, 2009), while all plan to try to prevent, cope with and minimise the effects of abuse, especially on children (Harne and Radford 2008; Williamson 2010).

Even during moments of physical violence, the responses of those abused are often highly rational. Meghan (above) describes her efforts to control her nerves and negotiate with her partner after an incident of extreme violence – for her, this internal struggle was life-saving behaviour. Jennifer (above) recounts a pattern of thought and action that she enacted each time her partner began smashing doors and furniture and attacking her, that centred on her children’s welfare. Her strategy, while feeling vital at the time, also served to distract her from what was happening to her, the full impact of which she did not feel until she had finally left her partner. Such deferral is, like doublethink, a survival strategy, and a common element in the development of PTSD (Herman 1997; Hennessey 2011). Here resistance acts as a brake on self-recognition of fear and trauma, which disrupts any simple pathway from violence to fear to resistance to leaving.

Although such resistance is constrained and, as I go on to discuss, its effectiveness sometimes opaque, it clearly constitutes agency, which has been underplayed in analyses of fear of violence generally (Koskela 1997; Pain 2009). Power and resistance are commonly understood as entangled; everyone exercises power and is subject to it. But the contextualisation of agency is vital, its existence and limits varying in particular sites (Pile and Keith 1997; Sharp et al 2000). In the context of global economic restructuring, Katz (2004) distinguishes between three forms of resistance. First, resistance is direct oppositional action that challenges oppressive practices or structures. Second, reworking changes the organization and effects of power, but not its basic presence and forms. And third, resilience enables survival without challenging or changing the conditions of power.

All three forms can be seen in the responses of those suffering domestic abuse – another expression of structural hegemonic power. As predominantly small acts, most can be understood as the third form, resilience. Nonetheless, these are never straightforward, categorisable actions with predicted effects. Resilience was widespread among interviewees while they were living with the abuser, and commonly consisted of developing elaborate precautions. Most changed aspects of their behaviour to try and avoid abuse and make the

relationship safer for themselves and their children. Some of this involves what Cavanagh (2003) has called 'doing gender'; sometimes paying more attention to domestic chores, but always to what I have called 'emotional housework', taking responsibility for managing, counselling and trying to fix the abuser (see Pain and Scottish Womens Aid 2012). At times, some were able to engage in reworking: fighting back, refusing to yield to abusers' demands or making the changes required by them, and telling other people what is happening. For Cavanagh (2003), challenging violence in these ways involves 'not doing gender'.

Given the site of intimate abuse, resistance may often not have positive effects. The strategies described rarely protected interviewees from being broken down psychologically, and did not lead them to leave, at least initially (Enadner and Holmberg 2008). There is a feeling among interviewees that while precautionary behaviour felt vital at the time (and may indeed have saved lives), it did not actually increase security from further violence or reduce fear over the long term. As Enadner and Holmberg (2008) argue, small resistances may offer a sense of control over the situation, but this sense is usually illusory. Practices such as emotional housework were initially undertaken partly with the hope that the abuser would come to change but, in hindsight, kept interviewees in the relationship longer, rather than helping them to leave. Even actions that can be understood as reworking may initially demonstrate to people that they are not subordinated, which delays leaving. Importantly, the interviewees were aware of this double bind, and saw some of their actions as necessary compromises in an extreme situation.

Moreover, especially when oppression is experienced over a long period of time, it becomes difficult to distinguish between different forms and effects of resistance. For example, for Cavanagh (2003) changing behaviour in order to comply with abusers' demands does not challenge power. But for many of those I interviewed, this became over time a performance as well as a form of risk minimization, behind which they were strategizing about how to change the situation, as I go on to discuss. Katz's (2004) typology of resistance is underpinned by recognition of the interconnections between each form. Resistance to domestic violence is a long term process, comprising many tremors; very small and often invisible struggles over power, moves forward and moves back, that sometimes do build up to major shifts. As Williamson (2010) points out, even the extreme response of a suicide attempt, which does

not first appear as resistance, may nonetheless be a key event in prompting survival and change. What happens to fear, and what does it do, during this long process?

*Build-up: planning to leave*

Sam: It is actually thinking about doing it, and doing it [leaving]...It's two different things...But I just did it one day.

Kate: I was just kind of "OK, I've just got to figure out how to do this, now what's the best way to do this that minimises the risk for me and the kids".

Nina: Once I also phoned the health visitor just because I was so worried about my baby, I thought "if he harms the baby what will I do?". But when I phoned the health visitor he was there standing next to me, and then he was shouting saying "now you know what I am really like, you are going to see what I'll do to you", and things like that. So I got so scared that I phoned the health visitor and said "please don't come to my house, everything's fine now".

Rachel: Did you tell her the reason?

Nina: No I had not, I was crying so much that I couldn't say, all I said was "I need your help" and I think she did guess but after I phoned to say "don't come round here" she couldn't then.

Rachel: Yes so you tried.

Nina: I did try, yes.

Rachel: You tried to tell people.

Nina: Yes but then when I thought of all the consequences and again my grandmother, aunt, everybody kept saying "you have to try your best, your marriage is not a joke", you know and I didn't have the courage to say "it's not all my fault".

Margie: I tried to leave him after we'd been married for seven years, I did leave him... I went by train I didn't take a car, and my dad gave me a cup of coffee, gave the kids something to drink...and drove us straight back. He said "you've made your bed you've

got to lie in it”...So basically I went back and I had to make a decision that I’m just going to have to stick it out.

Jennifer: It was sort of felt quite depressed, but then through that counselling I started feeling excited, I started feeling hopeful like you know there was some alternative...But I couldn’t see how to get from A to B, but I knew that that’s what I wanted...then it’s like suddenly the whole of your life opens up and you realise that your life doesn’t have to be like this forever, and it’s really exciting you know it’s a very happy sort of thought, but then at the same time you know the reality of getting there is like really, really hard work, frightening, a lot of the time I would just back off, I would try and have a conversation with him about it and then he would scare the shit out of me and I would back off and I would sort of have to regroup for a few weeks and think “well how am I going to do this? How am I going to do this?” and then I wouldn’t be excited you know I would be desperate, unhappy, confused, scared and...he did everything that he could to try and prevent it you know including just deliberately using force and scaring me and threatening me...I was scared that he would do something really stupid, but at the same time I knew that I had to weigh things up and I had to be rational, and I had to just, I had to trust that that would not happen, I had to believe that that wouldn’t happen so I had to overcome that fear because if I didn’t overcome that fear then there was no way anything was ever going to change.

As the last section made clear, it takes time to develop resistance. It is common to try different strategies as time goes on, and indeed to try to leave more than once, as Margie (above) explained in her interview. Because she felt that her father’s lack of support effectively meant she had to choose between losing future contact with him and living with her husband, she didn’t argue when her father drove her back home. She also experienced less physical violence from her partner than any other interviewee, which at the time made her doubt whether his emotional and psychological cruelty was really abuse. Margie ‘stuck it out’ for another 30 years. There are many reasons for multiple leavings: financial inequality, social pressure from others to stay (as in Nina’s case), fear of the impact on children or of losing children, and a well justified fear of more extreme violence (Abrahams 2010; Humphreys and

Thiara 2002; Stark 2007). So once the decision has been taken to leave, taking it through to completion can take years, and during the build-up a complex practice of risk management comes into play (see Kate and Jennifer, above).

Leaving appears to resemble Katz's first form of resistance, directly challenging oppression, and for many feminist writers it has been seen as the primary manifestation of successful resistance. But it is not always successful in terms of achieving separation from the abuser, rarely clean-cut in terms of ending abuse, and it is usually the result of a long process. Emotionally, fear drives the desire to leave, as well as being part of the rationale for staying. Neither force is more or less rational than the other. Leaving is the eventual culmination of an interplay between the affective and cognitive aspects of fear mentioned earlier in relation to moments of violence, as Jennifer's account (above) illustrates – there are potential risks to oneself and one's children, whichever decision is taken. In interviewees' vivid descriptions of the embodied aspects of fear and the cognitive emotional responses which become the bedrock of resistance, it is possible to see, as others have argued, how affect and emotion are not only simultaneous in experience, but together drive social change at different scales (Askins 2008; mrs c kinpaisby-hill 2011; Wright 2008).

#### *Quake: critical moments*

Kim: He described the way he was going to kill me in front of my daughter who was I believe three and a half or four...for him to scare my daughter this way because then she was crying, begging him to not kill me that was, you know, the alarm... I just called the police...I mean I was so, the changement was so strong, I did say I wasn't even scared any more.

Cheryl: He started as in punching me and pulling my hair and everything and like, when the kids at that moment in time...I knew that I was out of there and I wasnae looking back... I was scared and I was anxious and I was distraught and everything like, I knew as soon as I was getting out that door I was running.

Candy: This one particular night he'd come in in the middle of the night drunk and woken me up and shouted that he'd been with another woman, and I says "well" I says

“if that’s the case I’m going to leave you” I says...At this point I was too angry with the fact that he just told me he was with someone, and it was strength from I don't know where because I knew that if I spoke back to him I could get a really you know good thumping basically...I just thought I can't, because I’d got to that point that night I actually thought I’d rather be dead than put up with this any more, or I wish he would just you know hurt me that much that you know it’s the end, because I just thought I can't deal with this any more, and I was at that point that even above my child, I thought you know I’ll kill myself if he doesn't kill me, it was getting you know to that point.

Rachel: You just got to a point where you just couldn’t take any more.

Candy: I just didn't want to live like that any more and because I didn't, I was too afraid to just have the guts to just go you know. But once that night had happened and come, and when he done what he done I just thought “no that’s it” you know “I’ve done this for too long”, and all I kept thinking was “now I’ve got to protect me and my son” so that was that.

Nina: The incident that made me leave after seventeen years was when again he was angry that, oh it was just a silly thing, I don't know what I had cooked and he didn’t like it, a simple thing like that, so he was shouting his head off and really saying horrible things so I turned round and said “how can you say such things, is that how you have been brought up? We were never brought up like that”. So that’s what I think really, just because I said something like that it annoyed him so much he just strangled me and for a few minutes I couldn’t breathe, but I still managed to push him away...He thought I would you know how I used to cry and say I’m sorry and blah-blah but at that point I now thought “this is not on, I don't want to be here”.

Rachel: It was a big change.

Nina: A big change because he assaulted me, I thought you know “he could have killed me, who could look after my children?” So I had planned that night I had thought I am going to pack my bag...something inside me that said “no I have to improve life for my daughters, I have to give them a better chance”.

Petunia: Well that was the only time that I woke up, that was the day that I got her out of the house...

Rachel: Was it something you gradually thought about and worked towards or was there a moment when it just suddenly hit you that this is what had to happen?

Petunia: I didn't know how to do it, and it was in my mind and I was discussing it with my friend, but the final day when I did actually do it was the day when I walked in and I got flattened and the house was all smashed.

Margie: When he accused me of not letting him get the full potential out of his bus pass I just snapped and inside me I just grabbed my mobile... I just rang up my son and said I'm leaving him tomorrow...I just suddenly thought I don't have to put up with this....I think I must have been subconsciously getting more and more angry that he wouldn't let me out...I think I just got so angry that the anger overrode being scared.

All of the interviewees identified particular incidents or events that they saw as triggering the eventual physical act of leaving. The six interviewees above describe very different critical moments: all involving affective shocks that result in a quake, after a long process of build up, triggering a seismic event that appears to be the moment that changes the landscape.

The idea of critical moments, or turning points, has been widely applied in diverse literatures seeking to understand transitions within individual biographies (Thomson et al 2002). For Giddens (1991), 'fateful moments' are those at which individuals' self identity is forged through an interplay of structure and agency, carrying the potential for empowerment. Here, my interest is in how particular moments are framed as transformative in narratives about emotion. Psychotherapeutic literatures also identify moments of insight about one's situation that can be empowering in pursuing change. In the context of domestic violence, Enadner and Holmberg (2008) discuss a cognitive shift where people begin to see a relationship as abusive, a turning point within the longer process of leaving.

Typically, interviewees describe the balance between fear and strength altering at critical moments, and this, either immediately or eventually, may help to precipitate the act of leaving. On the other hand, this may be sabotaged by further violence or action by the abuser. During this emotional shift, interviewees describe a feeling of strength taking over, but it is often precipitated by fear, which always remains present and may intensify once the critical

moment is over. Several also describe a sense of overpowering anger which is then mobilized in some way. In most cases, the critical moment is triggered by a particular incident of abuse, often involving violence that is life-threatening, or threats of that nature, and a sudden sense that it is too much to take. But critical moments can have many forms, being banal as well as dramatic; it may just be a very small incident or comment that is felt as the last straw after years of abuse. This was the case for Margie, as the incident that triggered her anger and her decision to finally leave her husband was far more minor than for Candy (above), but it had the same effect.

Children were central to many of the critical moments described (see Kim and Cheryl's accounts, above), either because they were being victimised, they witnessed abuse, or the effects that domestic violence was having on them suddenly became clear. Mothers are still often blamed for not protecting children sooner by simply walking out, but the majority of women being abused fear that they or their children will be subject to greater violence or killed if they leave (Humphreys and Thiara, 2002). Leaving, then, is a delicate balancing act for mothers in particular.

These critical moments identified by interviewees were only superficially single moments. What happens is not a sudden change of heart, but the culmination of a gradual shift in perspective, emotions, or simply the ability or opportunity to leave. This involves fighting fear, making judgments about risk and security, and juggling different feelings. As we have seen, there is often a long build up to this before something 'clicks' or 'switches'. Sometimes there are several critical moments before, during and after (multiple) leavings. The build up may result in great frustration with oneself for, in Candy's words (above), 'not having the guts to just go'. From the outside, they are judged in miscomprehension for not 'just leaving'. But at the same time, they are continuing to do the work of managing the abuser, protecting their children, and hiding their feelings, a highly stressful performance often accompanied by symptoms of anxiety and trauma such as insomnia, loss of appetite and hyper-alertness. Self blame often heightens as time goes on, whether they stay or go.

#### *4.4 Aftermath: rebuilding*

Bobbie: It didnae matter how many times I locked my door or whatever he was at my door kicking it and everything...so and I always took him back... he kept coming back...and everything would be fine, it would be good for a couple of months and then it just went all pear shape again.

Michael: There's things that are they don't go away, you want them to but they're never going to go away but it's "how am I going to live with them now?" ... I go out, I enjoy meself, I smile, I do the things you know, I get on with me job, me job's very, very important to me and so I feel as if I've, I have come out the other side but it's still there.

Meghan: I dinnae want to like sit in ken [you know] missing my life because of that one person eh? Because I mean he's not doing that ken, I mean he's definitely not missing his life after what he done, and no I wouldnae, I wouldnae give in to him...The fight I have and that with myself every day is like for ken, not to get the better of me, and just not to give him the satisfaction of what he's done and me ken living like a hermit for the rest of my days because I just wouldnae, no...You think when that happens to you you're going to like absolutely sob your heart out eh, but that is something that I've never done, it's just more a fear factor than crying, cos I just thought nuh I would not shed a tear for that man, never ever, never ever.

Rachel: When you are talking you sound like you are a really strong person, do you think you always were?

Ellie: No...that's just kind of developed after the abuse that he's done to me, and I've had to be strong for the bairns [children] and what they have went through and it's just kicked off from there...

When I was going down the town I had to take my alarm...just in case I seen him...it was a nightmare...He was across the other side with his girlfriend. And he made a point of leaving her and coming right in front of me and the bairns, and going past, and I'm going "you're a fucking arse" and I just kept walking...And I wasn't, I didn't panic, my hands weren't shaking...I thought to myself, I'm going "look I've put up with your crap for so long" I goes "you are not getting away with it now"...Then I seen him

once after that and I just looked him straight in the eyes and I just kept walking, and I was fine after that one.

Ending abuse is a difficult and often incomplete process. A number of interviewees tried to leave the situation several times over many years (such as Bobbie, above). For many, the abuse continued after they had physically 'left' the abuser and their previous home (Harne and Redford 2008; Humphreys and Thiara, 2002), including physical or sexual assault, harassment and stalking, in a small number of cases continuing for months or years. In several cases, interviewees described their abuser coming to the house they were living in, whether or not there was a legal measure such as an injunction aimed at preventing this. In others, the abuser's contact with children provided the opportunity to abuse the interviewee. Because of this ongoing abuse, fear not only continues after separation but may intensify. This fear heightens the other insecurities and uncertainties that interviewees were facing (for example over housing, money, or children's emotional wellbeing). Fear is sometimes a reason for returning to live with the abuser, as this may seem a more controllable and less frightening option.

The idea that recovery takes a linear path ending in completion is, as Tamas (2011) notes, is a 'modernist progress-narrative' (150) that is questionable. Tamas argues that people who have suffered domestic abuse, especially women, have their experiences named on their behalf, and are located along a linear timescale of recovery by psychotherapeutic interventions and other service providers. The underpinning assumption is that self-knowledge about what happened will empower us, eventually leading to a change in feelings. Tamas' nuanced and moving work shows that, from the perspective of those abused, this expectation does not always fit reality: recovery is not tidy and sequential, but circular and zigzagging. The language of recovery is appealing as it 'imposes a certain logic on what may otherwise feel like random suffering', and yet 'performing the role of a recovering abuse survivor in response to these external and internal pressures can provoke a sense of fraudulence, alienation and resentment that compounds our difficulties with trust' (Tamas 2011, 140).

None of the interviewees felt recovered. However, the concept of a trajectory of recovery, such as that outlined by Herman (1997) and used by many trauma counsellors, had been useful to some as a framework for making sense of nonsensical experiences. While fear does not recede completely, determination and strength 'not to get the better of me' emerge as key emotions as time goes on (see Michael and Meghan, above). Ellie (above) recounts what she feels is the first time she was able to fully control her fear of her ex-partner, on seeing him on the street some time after leaving him. Interviewees talked about their pride in having changed their situation for themselves and their children, and sometimes having a new perspective on life or a new sense of mission to help others (Herman 1997).

### **A 'quiet politics' of activism**

These practices [of resistance]...are [critical] for undergirding subsequent broader oppositional practices. Beyond their socially reinforcing and fortifying role, these practices also act in and of the world, sometimes changing it (Katz 2004: 152).

The idea of seismologies of emotion helps to frame how fear develops, shifts and affects practices of resistance over time. This is a long term process, as fear never disappears, but it moves, intensifies, draws back, and combines with other emotions. It can be both a hugely constraining and a mobilising force. Interviewees' accounts have shown the complexity of resistance, rebutting any simple pathway between violence, fear, acts of resistance and leaving.

What does this tell us about the political agency of people experiencing domestic violence? In arguing here that these women and men were engaged a form of activism, I draw on Kye Askins' (2013) notion of 'quiet politics'. Domestic violence works through fear, which buttresses wider political relations (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Stark 2007) just as other forms of violent terror attempt to do (Pain forthcoming). Resistance to domestic violence, which, as we have seen, is many and varied, is a political struggle, and emotions have a central place in this. It is important not to exaggerate the potential and possibilities of these private actions, given that they are so isolated, fraught, constrained and dangerous, or to present outcomes as wholly positive (they never are), but it is helpful to understand how people experiencing

abuse manage to challenge power relations that are at once intimate and structural, and that appear unassailable (Hammer 2002). I have argued that resistance here consists of acts, moments and interventions that, though small and quiet, still contribute to a wider process that ultimately may lead to change.

Activism has traditionally been conceived of as political action through formal public arenas reflecting the practices of elite men, as 'demonstrably physical acts of defiance against hegemonic regimes. Such an agent of change is normatively fixed in the formal political sphere' (Askins 2011:531; see also Horton and Kraftl 2009; Staeheli and Cope 1994). Feminists have been instrumental in redefining activism, through both activist practice and scholarship, understanding it as 'a *type* of human behaviour rather than as an *arena*...through which people act or attempt to effect change...that involves the negotiation, alteration, or entrenchment of social values and resources' (Abrahams 1992: 329-330). Thus political action may take place across everyday life and structural and institutional systems of power relations (Abrahams 1992). Such an approach opens up activism to 'illuminate the political activities of *most people*; for example, those who are not elite actors, those who are not visible in the formal governmental system, and those who are not formally identified with a social movement' (ibid 329; my emphasis). It involves explicit consideration of how structural power relations of gender, race and class shape political action (Abrahams 1992), of the negotiation of power relations in the private domestic sphere, and of how these intersect with more 'public' struggles (Staeheli and Cope 1994). This work has established that the spaces and scales of resistance are crucial to political action, illuminating the creation of new geographies for resistance and political alternatives (Martin et al 2007; Staeheli 1994).

Geographers have been prominent among those unpacking mainstream views of activism more recently, albeit largely in more public and collective spaces of protest and action. They also suggest that activism includes not only spectacular, staged actions which have a clear legacy, but also more banal, everyday actions and relations (Chatterton 2006, Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Horton and Kraftl 2009; Lee 2013). Moreover, activism and the emotions associated with them take form and are embodied within particular sites and spaces (Brown and Pickerill 2009; van Wijnendaele 2010). The transformative and subversive potential of activism is also place- and time- specific, especially as dominant groups become wise to tactics of resistance and work to diminish their effectiveness (Routledge 2010).

As Askins (2011:528) notes, 'consideration of the everyday, embodied agencies of activists, *alongside* more 'traditional' activism and movements, can help us to reframe debates stuck in a division between international and domestic spheres'. Likewise, I have argued that people's struggles against domestic violence take different forms on different occasions. This activism is not always planned, strategic, or working against hegemonic power with intent; it may be faltering and unanticipated, and has a messy relationship with power and resistance. Resistance does not always clearly work against violence and fear: some of the time, it must work with them. Emotions cannot be seen to always produce rational strategies that 'work' to empower (van Wijnaendaele 2010). This is an uneven path of activism that is well reflected in movements at other scales.

### **Conclusion: violence, individual and collective action**

We are left with a final question concerning how far these actions and practices constitute political activism. Actions are understood as activism if they become part of creating progressive change for a wider group or society in some way, even if they are not directly connected to wider social movements (Martin et al 2007). This multi-sited notion of political change, developed by feminists in particular, reflects an interest in how 'small actions [...] can lead to varied forms of contact and engagement that hold the potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and to anticipate new political acts' (Staeheli et al 2012: 630). For those experiencing domestic violence, as we have seen, resistance is largely undertaken in private space and alone. Askins (2011) acknowledges the presence of both of private emotions and those affects that circulate between people in the doing of political acts, and argues that these are one and the same, but most accounts of emotions in activism emphasise the collective aspects. In his account of clowning at the G8 summit protests in Gleneagles 2005, Routledge (2010:3) describes 'sensuous solidarities', the ways that 'emotions are intimately bound up with power relations and also with relations of affinity, and are a means of initiating action'.

But in situations of domestic violence, the main site of the co-production of emotions is in the space between abused and abuser, a quiet politics, small-scale, careful, often going unnoticed by the abuser, is often the only form that is possible. Horton and Kraftl (2009) propose that

much of political life is in fact made up of implicit activism, that are not necessarily linked directly to wider social movements. Askins (2013), in her analysis of emotional interactions between those taking part in befriending schemes, argues that such small acts can and do move between scales; words, gestures and banal acts may cumulatively constitute a transformative politics of encounter.

To conclude, then, I consider with caution some of the ways in which activism in individual situations of domestic violence become scaled up, anticipating or engendering social and political change at other scales. Understanding these connections and relations can help to inform appropriate societal responses to domestic violence.

People's practices of resistance to domestic violence very rarely remain completely private; they are inevitably, as Katz puts it, 'in and of the world, sometimes changing it'. While the majority of interviewees did not tell anyone what was happening to them for months or years, as time went on they were rarely acting completely alone. Most got some support from others around them (most often other family members or friends, but sometimes a service worker or other professional), particularly in the build up to leaving, the time of leaving itself, and the aftermath. Many studies have shown the importance of this support, especially from friends and family (Barrett and St Pierre 2011; Humphreys and Joseph 2004). While such support had a considerable effect in disrupting the psychological dynamics of abuse, especially the abuser's narrative of blame, it was often only sought or accepted by interviewees once they had reached a point where they were ready to use it as a resource in their own activism. Hence social support sometimes resulted in a significant enhancement of safety, but only if the emotional shifts outlined earlier were already taking place. After abuse has ended, recognition that our experience was not unique but is shared by others is an important way in which social support helps healing and rebuilding (Herman 1997).

In these cases, individual activism not only becomes supported by collective action, but there is a feedback loop. Through this kind of social contact with people who experience domestic violence – which is not uncommon, given its prevalence - knowledge about domestic violence spreads through networks of friends and communities, and this sometimes goes on to inform and act as a resource for others who are experiencing abuse or who go on to experience it in the future. This is how the wider social movement against violence against women in the

West mobilised in the 1960s and 1970s: wider scale social recognition and policy changes originated in people coming together, talking about private experiences and recasting these as collective and political (McCue 2008). Many anti-violence movements and organisations have similar roots, if traced back in time, and higher than average numbers of individuals who work in them today, as well as therapists, volunteers, researchers and others who work to reduce violence or support victims, have experiences of abuse that have prompted their chosen specialism.

This argument about social learning has special resonance in relation to children. Children who see their parent challenging abuse, and being supported by others in doing so, are learning valuable lessons which make it less likely that they will become abusive or abused themselves in the future (Scottish Executive 2003; Scottish Women's Aid 2010). Children who then receive some form of therapeutic intervention will be most secure from future violence of all; but simply seeing domestic violence challenged and condemned can alter future outcomes significantly (Radford and Hester 2006; Hennessey 2011). This was a key intention for the mothers interviewed. It is also one of the most effective ways in which individual activism can radiate outwards, slowly but cumulatively, to create a safer societal context.

If it stands alone, however, this pathway to ending abuse is problematic. We have also seen, for example, that individual activism does not always work to end violence, or else takes a very long time, in the meantime entailing great harm to the abused parent and their children. Social contacts do not always respond actively, or positively; several interviewees had told family members but did not receive support that helped them to cope with or leave the abuse, and some received responses that reinforced their physical, psychological or emotional entrapment. Moreover, there is considerable danger in placing responsibility on the individuals suffering domestic violence for ending abuse. The tendency to blame victims sustains the problem of abuse, its persistence and private nature, in the first place. Importantly, the outcomes of activism may be more positive for some people suffering domestic violence than others, depending on their social and economic circumstances. While there has not been space to draw out such differences between interviewees in this paper, racism, ethnocentrism, class privilege, heterosexism and ablism not only produce diverse experiences of violence, but significantly shape help-

seeking behaviour (Crenshaw 1991; Donovan et al 2006; Harne and Radford, 2008; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005; from this research, see Pain and Scottish Womens Aid 2012).

Individual resistance and activism, then, are often part of wider social changes. But it remains that the actions described in this paper are only necessary in a wider social and political climate which continues to place more emphasis on individual than collective responsibility for domestic violence. The lack of wider recognition of the trauma experienced by people who suffer domestic violence is stark when compared to societal acknowledgement of more public forms of violence such as war and terrorism (Pain forthcoming). People around the abused person, and in wider society, have a vital role in creating a context where it is easier to leave domestic violence. Indeed, it can be argued that political activism is only necessary where formal political mechanisms do not adequately protect or ensure people's rights, in this case to safety. Despite the significant changes in state responses to domestic violence in western countries the late twentieth century onwards, relatively little has changed in that rates of domestic violence and attrition both remain high, there is still deep-rooted sexism and racism in the working of legal processes, and victims' voices seldom drive processes or outcomes (INCITE! 2006; Walklate 2006). Major cultural and political shifts are required if individuals are to be adequately supported and protected.

At present, conditions at a structural and institutional level compound individual fear in intimate situations of abuse (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Brownmiller 1975). Fear is never simply about one's immediate situation, then, but is relational; emotions felt in an intimate setting may be reinforced or alleviated by actions at other scales. I have argued in this paper that people who experience domestic violence, whether they leave the situation or not, are engaged in a form of political activism. But the eradication of fear requires wider social responsibility for violence.

Cheryl: I feel more confident now...about life as well...I'm proud of myself like how far I've come and like that I done it on my own.

Stephen: No, no it never goes away, no.

Ellie: Move forward, dinnae go back the way, there's hope for the future and just forget about the past, just keep it in the past.

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